

# **CORPOREALITY IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION**

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My dissertation argues that a number of novels published in the U.S. during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries work to reveal corporeality's contributions to knowledge and meaningful human action. Many critics have proposed that fictional treatments of bodies during this period provide a means for understanding the diminished capacities for human agency in modernity. However, my dissertation proposes that figurings of dynamic embodiment in some turn-of-the-century American writers' works present corporeality as a shared condition of embodied beings, a condition that offers ethical insights into the nature of personhood. Even as bodies were being disciplined in military and civilian life to serve the states' purposes, American novels were evoking the body's complex resources for other forms of thought and action.

The emphasis on physicality in literary works of the authors I examine has no doubt contributed to their notorious association with popular conceptions of late nineteenth-century determinist philosophies. My project suggests, though, that these writers' philosophical interest in embodiment marks a serious engagement with a corporeal-centered epistemology. I propose that turn-of-the-century writers' literary expressions of corporeality in many respects anticipates non-dualist theories of embodiment later elaborated by phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In these accounts, the body is conceived as an active entity itself that is inextricably bound up with consciousness, rather than an inert object directed by a controlling

mind. Feminist and cultural theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and Laura Doyle have recently worked to re-appropriate and supplement phenomenological accounts of the body's role in human relations and action. In doing so, they have helped to elaborate the potential significance of these conceptions. Drawing on this theoretical work, my dissertation is an effort to rethink treatments of corporeality in some late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century U.S. fictions by authors such as Charles Chesnutt, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris, and Edith Wharton.

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## **PREFACE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Inspired by recent work in feminist theory, phenomenology, and eco-studies, this dissertation examines the ethical significance of corporeality in a series of male-authored novels published in the U.S. at the turn of the century. As Gail Weiss has recently remarked, “The body’s role in calling us to respond ethically to one another has continued to be egregiously neglected” (161). Studying literary treatments of embodiment in texts by London, Norris, Dreiser, and Chesnutt, I propose, can help us to better understand and appreciate this crucial role. My work in this project sheds new light on a set of fictional texts whose attention to embodiment has not generally been recognized as having important implications for our present efforts to think about literature’s relationship to the concerns of ethics.

Some feminists have pointed to long-standing philosophical traditions in seeking explanations as to why, broadly speaking, the body has not traditionally been regarded as a primary feature of Western human identity. Susan Bordo, among others, has identified a pervasive mind-body dualism dating back to the writings of Plato which has worked to separate the body from the spirit and the mind. Recognizing historical variations in constructions of the body as an entity distinct from soul or mind, Bordo further observes, “But what remains the constant element throughout historical variation is the *construction* of body as something apart from the true self (whether conceived as soul, mind, spirit, will creativity, freedom. . . ) and as undermining the best efforts of that self. That which is not-body is the highest, the best, the

noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization” (5). Moreover, as Bordo and others have pointed out the female body has frequently been figured as the corporeal pole of the mind-body dualism.<sup>1</sup> Along this line, ecological feminist philosopher Valerie Plumwood underscores, the dominant conception of humanity in the West has been founded on exclusion of both the feminine and of nature, “a model that maximizes difference and distance from the animal, the primitive, and the natural” (25). In a related vein, critiques of the disembodied white male citizen constituted by Enlightenment thought pinpoint, in particular, the historical suppression or erasure of white male embodiment within the terms of citizenship, or “the asymmetry of corporeal identity that underlies the category of citizenship within modernity” (Wiegman 6). Characterizing the process by which citizenship becomes based on one’s exemption from certain corporeal features in the U.S., Robyn Wiegman remarks:

. . . it was the repression of the specific racial and gender markers of privileged identity—of whiteness and maleness—that characterized the figure ‘American citizen’ and inaugurated its rhetorical definition as an inclusive social body. In this constitution of the citizen as a disembodied entity, bound not to physical delineations but to national ones, the white male was (and continues to be) ‘freed’ from the corporeality that might otherwise impede his insertion into the larger body of national identity. (94)

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<sup>1</sup>Elaborating on the logic of this association and its effects, Bordo notes, “The cost of such projections to women is obvious. For if, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, *the body* is the negative term, and if woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death” (5). An additional dimension of this dualism, noted by Bordo and others, is the gendering of an active spirit and passive body.

This conception indicates that white males, and those seeking the status of citizenship, have been discouraged from acknowledging the body's centrality to identity because to do so would undermine their claims to such privileged status.

These accounts suggest the ways in which the effacement of bodies have worked to profoundly shape, and perhaps to distort, humans' relations to each other and to their surrounding environments. In this way, conceptions of embodiment are profoundly bound up with ensuring or endangering the possibilities for inhabiting a "livable world," to use Judith Butler's phrase. My own study of literary treatments of embodiment engages recent work by feminist and cultural critics focusing on the body's significance for a politically-inflected ethics. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler meditates on a central question for ethics: "It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable?" (17). This concern of the self's relation to others is indeed resonant with what Drucilla Cornell describes as the ethical relation. Cornell explains, "The ethical relation, a term which I contrast with morality, focuses instead on the kind of person one must become in order to develop a nonviolative relationship to the Other. The concern of the ethical relation, in other words, is a way of being in the world that spans divergent value systems and allows us to criticize the repressive aspects of competing moral systems" (13).<sup>2</sup> Recent feminist work on ethics has thus summoned up both an ethical imperative not to harm or violate others and an ethical responsibility to make our shared world better for ourselves and others. My attention to corporeality in fiction contributes to an ethical

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<sup>2</sup>Articulating the contrast with morality, Cornell states, ". . . 'morality' designates any attempt to spell out how one *determines* a 'right way to behave,' behavioral norms which, once determined, can be translated into a system of rules" (13).

project concerned with questions of the self's relation to itself and others, as well as its responsibilities and obligations to others.

“Putting the body on the intellectual map,” as scholars have done in the past several decades, has made the body a prime subject of theoretical investigation, allowing us to more closely consider the effects of traditional philosophical conceptions of embodiment (Davis 1).<sup>3</sup> Some cultural and feminist critics specifically interested in exploring the ways in which the body might figure into the ethical relation have granted new attention, specifically, to the corporeal-centered epistemology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that rejects a mind-body dualism. Practicing a “postmodern phenomenology,” to borrow Laura Doyle’s suggested phrasing, these critics have revived Merleau-Ponty’s theories of embodiment in exploring the ways in which close attention to corporeal experience can serve a politically-inflected ethics.<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology is, at a basic level, concerned to understand bodily or embodied experience. As we know, of course, the shape of embodied experience is greatly dependent upon a variety of cultural and historical factors. Informed by poststructuralist insights that resist universalist

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<sup>3</sup>As many scholars have noted, critical attention to embodiment has produced a veritable explosion in body studies (Davis 1). In her overview of this work, Kathy Davis cites some specific manifestations of the neglect of the body in more traditional academic inquiries. She notes, “Traditionally, science has been reluctant to deal with the material body, displaying what Scott and Morgan (1993) refer to as an ‘anti-body bias’. Philosophers have tended to disparage bodies in favour of the mind, while theologians have decried the body as the enemy of the soul (Synnott, 1993). Social scientists have tended to focus on social structures, institutions and collectivities, relegating the actual body to the domain of biology (Turner, 1984)” (3). As Davis points out, feminist scholarship has been at the forefront of the move to redress these oversights, from offering analyses of symbolic representations of female bodies to undertaking studies of the conceptualization of women’s bodies in scientific and medical discourses.

<sup>4</sup>Most recent critics engaging phenomenology, then, acknowledge critiques of phenomenology’s supposed universalist or covertly gendered claims. As Doyle notes, however, with regard especially to the writings of Merleau-Ponty, such critiques “do not exclude the bricoleur activities of selecting, recomposing, and supplementing Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology for resistant political purposes” (*Bodies of Resistance: New Phenomenologies of Politics, Agency, and Culture* xiii). Feminist critics such as Iris Young and Carol Bigwood demonstrate the type of sensibility Doyle advocates in incorporating Merleau-Ponty’s insights into their own. On the whole, these critics are careful to explain that they are not invoking phenomenological theories in order to gain access to some universal bodily experience, but to achieve more complex understandings of bodies’ operations in their various environments and their relations to other bodies.

assumptions, recent thinkers engaging phenomenology are mindful of the extent to which socially constructed differences influence embodied experience. Nevertheless, this work indicates that attending to the body's capacities and range of experiences can have significant ethical import.<sup>5</sup>

Phenomenological accounts of embodiment emphasize the body's status as both a sensing subject and material object. Not simply inert matter directed by a conscious mind, the "lived" body is always actively bound up with the surrounding world. Furthermore, the body's sensory capacities, as William Cohen emphasizes, makes it open or permeable to the world (439). This permeability, or the body's capacity for openness to its surroundings, is precisely a crucial point of interest for recent critics. As critics note, this bodily openness facilitates corporeal continuity among persons, or a state in which persons may experience salient connections to other beings. The sensing body is significant in this respect because it is virtually "built" for attunement to others; the senses allow us, as Maurice Hamington has put it, "to experience one another richly" (48). In this way, persons' sensory encounters with other bodies

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<sup>5</sup>Recent critical interest in phenomenology seems in part a result of the limitations of social constructionist thought in theorizing corporeality. Along this line, Davis points out that while the sex/gender distinction that emphasizes the social construction of differences between the sexes has been critical to feminist scholarship, "one disadvantage was that the body remained an under-theorized backdrop. Feminist theory concentrated on the cultural meanings attached to the body or the social consequences of gender rather than on how individuals interacted with and through their bodies" (8). My study moves away from a deeply constructivist approach dismissing or downplaying anything resembling "nature." Along this line, Grosz explains that, while the idea of a pre-social, pre-linguistic body must be resisted, nevertheless: "It is not adequate to simply dismiss the category of nature outright, to completely retranscribe it without residue into the cultural: this in itself is the monist, or logocentric, gesture par excellence. Instead, the interimplication of the natural and the social or cultural needs further investigation—the hole in nature that allows cultural seepage or production must provide something like a natural condition for cultural production; but in turn the cultural too must be seen in its limitations, as a kind of insufficiency that requires natural supplementation. Culture itself can only have meaning and value in terms of its own other(s) when its others are obliterated—as tends to occur within the problematic of social constructionism—culture in effect takes on all the immutable, fixed characteristics attributed to the natural order" (21). Eve Sedgwick marks a similar departure from constructionism in her recent work on touch and affect, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity*. She notes, "I have also taken a distinct step to the side of the deconstructive project of analyzing apparently nonlinguistic phenomena in rigorously linguistic terms, as when Butler analyzes a particular gestural style as a variety of performative utterance" (6).

may provide an important condition for stimulating a sense of ethical responsibility for the care of other embodied beings, promoting a greater sense of what Jacob Rogozinski has called “carnal community.” Just as importantly, the body’s status as a material object gives it something in common with other bodies and its surroundings. Merleau-Ponty explains, “My body is made of the same flesh as the world (as it is perceived) and moreover this flesh of my body is shared by the world” (*The Visible and the Invisible* 248). Such an observation implicates the body not only in human-centered ethical calls for responsiveness, but also, as eco-philosophers suggest, in calls for responsibility to animals and the environments we share with them. Claiming embodiment as a central feature of personhood might thus serve to counter what Plumwood has deemed the “western construction of identity as outside of nature” that has had immensely damaging effects (2).

Postmodern phenomenology, I believe, provides a productive and fresh perspective from which to study fictional treatments of embodiment and their implications. The novels I’ll be discussing notably accord attention to their characters’ sensing bodies as they register the presence of other bodies. Characters’ status as material bodies in these literary texts likewise constitutes an integral component of what we might call their “characterhood.” In my interpretations of turn-of-the-century American fiction, I examine resonances between phenomenological conceptions of embodiment and the literary texts’ depictions of corporeality in order to suggest some of the ways in which these novels can enrich our understanding of the body’s role in negotiating ethical concerns. My study relies on both original texts by Merleau-Ponty as well as the work of more contemporary critics whose analyses, I believe, usefully supplement phenomenological theories.

Informed by theoretical work relating to embodiment, then, I am interested in investigating the ways in which the novels in my study employ literary techniques and forms—adopting non-human points-of-view or reworking the bildungsroman, for example—to emphasize bodies’ encounters with their surroundings and to suggest corporeality’s crucial role in shaping human insight and action. Drawing on postmodern phenomenology, I argue that these novels figure insight and agency as a product of richly sensory encounters with surrounding habitats and with embodied beings. In this way, the novels work to “retune our ways of being bodies in relation.”<sup>6</sup>

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I focus in this study on male-authored novels that center mainly on male characters, encouraged in part by Elizabeth Grosz’s suggestion that, in our efforts to theorize embodiment, “corporeality must no longer be associated with one sex (or race), which then takes on the burden of the other’s corporeality for it” (22).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, that novels written by men and focusing primarily on the experience of male characters would encourage the notion of being a body in relation to others and to one’s surroundings is, I find, significant since such a conception of embodiment works against both the tradition of disembodied white male citizenship I noted earlier as well as a more historically specific construction of masculinity operating at the turn of the century in the U.S. Accounts of turn-of-the-century American masculinity seem to belie the notion of a disembodied male citizen, for, as many of these accounts suggest, males’ identification with the body was strongly encouraged by the culture. Specifically, attention to male bodies played a

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<sup>6</sup>I am grateful to Kathryn Flannery for this apt phrasing.

<sup>7</sup>Grosz continues, “Women can no longer take on the function of being *the* body for men while men are left free to soar to the heights of theoretical reflection and cultural production” (22).

central role in responding to a turn-of-the-century “crisis of masculinity.” Numerous studies of the period describe an erosion of masculinity resulting from a whole host of conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the U.S., from women’s suffrage movements to the expansion of industrial capitalism to lingering effects of the Civil War. Michael Kimmel cites, in particular, the decline of an earlier nineteenth-century model of masculine identity founded largely on men’s “economic autonomy,” or ability to exercise control over their labor and the products resulting from their labor (43). The shift from a producer to a consumer-oriented culture necessitated reconstitutions of masculine identity and, notably, Kimmel points out, “. . .the most striking efforts [of men to reconstitute gender identity] had to do with the body” (43). Specifically, Kimmel elaborates:

By the turn of the century, a massive, nationwide health and athletics craze was in full swing, as men compulsively attempted to develop manly physiques as a way of demonstrating that they possessed the virtues of manhood. . .by century’s end, he was making over his physique to appear powerful physically, perhaps to replace the lost real power he once felt. If the body revealed the virtues of the man, then working on the body could demonstrate the possession of virtues that one was no longer certain one possessed. (45)

In this view, Kimmel suggests, the male body serves as an expression of a distinctly masculine virtue; it functions primarily as a means of recovering a lost power. Moreover, masculine embodiment in this context marks a clear distinction or opposition between men and women. Indeed, Kimmel points out such an assertion of the gender binary in noting, “While ‘manhood’ had historically been contrasted with ‘childhood,’ to suggest that manhood meant being fully adult, responsible, autonomous, the new opposite of ‘masculinity’ was ‘femininity,’



traits and attitudes associated with women, not children” (44). While this model of masculinity differs from that associated with Enlightenment citizenship, it clearly supports a way of being a male body that is similarly problematic. This configuration of masculine embodiment functioned to secure a fundamental separateness from women (as opposed to the body’s serving as a medium for or point of connection with women) and to recover a perceived loss of power or dominance.

This construction of masculine embodiment is thought to have figured not only into gender domination, but into U.S. imperial domination, as well. Cultural and literary critics alike have emphasized physical culture’s complicity with ideologies of imperialism and nationalism during this period. Male bodies enervated by modern conditions, it was thought, could be restored through vigorous physical activities such as sports, rough-riding, and ultimately, imperialist pursuits.<sup>8</sup> Bill Brown and Amy Kaplan have linked corporeal representations in literature of this era to the promotion of imperialist projects in the U.S. during the shift from continental to global expansion in the 1890s. Brown concludes, for example, that as an antidote to the disintegrated body of machine culture, this period’s fiction offers images of corporeal coherence that serve as a correlate to “the vision of an imperialist American body” (140). Analyzing imperialism’s reparative function following the Civil War, Amy Kaplan likewise asserts, “Moreover, new battlefields abroad reputedly restored health and vigor to the male body, so massively dismembered in the war between the states. In fact, the vitality of the male body became the symbolic medium for national restoration, as manliness figured the common ground between previously warring factions” (“Black and Blue” 219). Similarly zeroing in on the

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<sup>8</sup>Indeed, the notion of a “crisis” of masculinity is a contested one within masculinity studies; Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett note “. . . it is clear for there to be a crisis of masculinity there would have to be a single masculinity; something solid, fixed, immovable, brittle even” (8). Chapmen and Hendler add, “American masculinity has always been in crisis, in the sense of being constantly engaged in its own redefinition” (9).

images of unified and coherent male bodies that Brown highlights, Kaplan finds that some literary texts enlist an “anachronistic male corporeality,” based on traditional Anglo-Saxon warrior images in the service of alleviating national ambivalence about American imperialism. The stress on coherence and unity in these fictional treatments of male embodiment to which Kaplan and Brown call attention especially figure into a colonizing epistemological stance emphasizing one’s difference and separation from the colonized Other.

Distinctly opposed to these constructions of male embodiment in which the body functions to separate men from others, the novels I examine figure the body as a medium for connection to others. In this way, my work poses a challenge to the notion that much U.S. literature by male writers at the turn of the century worked to incite and support oppressive assertions of hegemonic masculinity. Although I think that the interpretations offered by Kaplan and Brown are provocative, I find that these readings of masculine corporeality holds limited use for analyzing the emphasis on male bodies in the turn-of-the-century writing that I examine here. Instead of insisting on the pugnacious coherence of male embodiment, the novels I examine feature male bodies that undercut corporeal self-unity and coherence and instead emphasize persons’ “corporeal continuity,” or intimate connection with their surroundings, including other embodied beings. My analyses suggest that these novels’ representations of the richness of embodied experience serves to circumvent the epistemologies and power relations of masculine domination. Fictional treatments of male bodies in my readings of some turn-of-the-century texts serve markedly less repressive ends than those suggested by many dominant accounts of literature of this period. In this way, my work poses a challenge to the notion that much U.S. literature by male writers at the turn of the century worked to incite and support oppressive assertions of hegemonic imperialist masculinity. I see my study as contributing to recent work

on American masculinity in the fields of gender studies and literary studies. *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, edited by Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, and *Wounded Hearts: Masculinity, Law, and Literature in American Culture* by Jennifer Travis are two recent studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature that have questioned some feminist literary critics' tendency to situate sympathy, sentiment, and emotion firmly within "the feminine sphere," a tendency which has served to reinforce the gender binary (Chapman and Hendler 7). I hope to add to these recastings of the gendering of sentiment in late nineteenth and early-twentieth century U.S. literature by showing the ways in which the "male-centered" novels I discuss present the body as a significant medium for developing more acute sensitivity to the bodies of others.

No doubt, we might expect that embodiment would occupy a central position in novels by London, Norris, and Dreiser which feature working-class situations and characters since one's working-class status arguably makes identification with the body less easy to evade. What I find especially interesting about these novels, though, is that the value of embodiment is made particularly visible in the novels' presentation of narratives of men who seek to distance themselves from their working-class status. In the first novel I discuss, London's *Martin Eden*, the ethical possibilities of corporeality come into view in the course of Martin's attempts to transcend his working-class status. Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, the subject of Chapter 3, feature male protagonists whose "development" into men of class privilege is concomitant with their insensitivity towards and violations of working-class women's bodies. In various ways, London, Dreiser, and Norris indicate through their novels the significance of corporeality by depicting the body's capacities for openness to the influence of other bodies. Likewise, they suggest that embodiment constitutes a shared status among persons,

granting importance to a person's recognition of that status. The work of African American novelist Charles Chesnutt which I discuss in Chapter 4 adds a crucial layer of complication to the capacities of the body that these writers reveal. While Chesnutt, too, acknowledges ethical promise inhering in embodiment in his novel *The Marrow of Tradition*, his novel further shows that the structure of social environments can severely obstruct or constrain the exercise of those capacities. Chesnutt vividly illustrates this point in figuring the relationship between the corporeal estrangement of segregation and the violence of lynching in the period following the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* verdict in 1893.

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My primary concern in this project, then, is to show how U.S. turn-of-the-century novels can enrich our understanding of the ethical significance of embodiment. I find that the authors in my study share an interest in what I will call a corporeal-centered ethics. While I will speculate briefly in Chapter 1 on some possible reasons for this shared concern, it is not my aim in this project to posit a historical explanation for these literary treatments of embodiment. That is, I am not suggesting that these authors' interest in or ways of attending to ethical aspects of corporeality are wholly unique. At the same time, the texts in my sample have not been arbitrarily selected, as anyone with even a passing familiarity with American literature is likely to detect. I am interested in this particular set of novels partly because critics' oft-noted observation that these literary texts figure persons as bodies has often been the grounds invoked to cast them as ethically *regressive*, offering a markedly bleak and limited view of humans' capacities for insight and meaningful action. I am referring, of course, to the inescapable association of writers such as London, Dreiser, Norris, and even Chesnutt with the genre of American literary naturalism. Naturalist writers have typically been regarded as literary

spokesman for popular determinist philosophies of the late nineteenth century which held persons' fates to be governed by biological instincts and impersonal economic forces. As Paul Civello has further observed, these writers grappled with the idea that in a post-evolutionary world, humans constitute but "one material phenomenon in a universe of material" (9). The notion of philosophers treating persons as "material" or "mere protoplasm" (Hussman vii) has come to mean for generations of literary critics that these writers were necessarily registering humans' diminished capacities for meaningful human action and ethical judgment in the wake of modern conditions. Consider Lee Clark Mitchell's assertion that, while realism treats individuals as moral agents, "naturalists" explore instead "the prospect that ethics might be irrelevant to the lives we live" (*Determined Fictions* 2). In this way, some critics working on naturalism have tended to treat signs of characters' physicality in these texts as marks of animality and therefore of human failure. It is important to note that this ethical indictment of naturalist texts is articulated not only throughout older naturalist criticism seeking to read these texts as literary expressions of determinist philosophies. As I detail further in the chapter on Dreiser and Norris, some contemporary critics charge that naturalist texts injuriously appeal to biological explanations for human actions (usually those that stress the inevitability and primacy of self-serving instincts) in order to make sense of inequities in the social world.

As I have just suggested, however, recent theories have highlighted the potential ethical value of acknowledging embodiment as a central feature of personhood, inviting new attention to these novels' efforts to depict corporeality. Indeed, reading the novels in light of these theories, I argue, reveals a complexity and ethical significance in them not previously recognized by critics. Reading the novels in this way enables us to appreciate qualities of these texts that may have been obscured for reasons owing to their presumed continuity with

determinist philosophies. Along with Jennifer Fleissner's recent work on naturalism, my study serves also to counter some feminist oriented studies of turn-of-the-century literature, such as Ann Ardis's analysis of 'New Woman' novels, that have dismissed texts in the naturalist canon as hostile to feminist aims given their status as "the literature of biological determinism" ("The Work of Womanhood in American Naturalism" 87). On that note, it is important to point out another long-standing strand of naturalist criticism. More than the literary equivalents of determinism, these novels, some critics have argued, distinctly celebrate humans' unique capacities for transcending or overcoming their animal nature.<sup>9</sup> This impulse on the part of critics is captured by June Howard's statement that, after conflations of naturalist texts with determinist theories, "the next most frequently made observation about naturalism must surely be that it is *not* pessimistic determinism" (36). Much of this criticism is concerned to draw out naturalist authors' implicit endorsement of the values of autonomy, self-determination, self-continuity, and self-contained interiority. These features also characterize what we have come to variously know and critique as the liberal humanist or bourgeois subject (Hurley 8). Liberal humanism supports a conception of human action situated from within an autonomous agent who is directed primarily by inner principles or isolated consciousness. Novels, according to critics such as Nancy Armstrong, have encouraged a widespread version of selfhood defined in terms of interior psychological features, or have fostered nineteenth-century middle-class readers' regard of themselves in terms of inner qualities. In this way, Armstrong argues, novels have contributed to the production of the liberal humanist or modern bourgeois subject (8). As critiques of the liberal humanist subject have emphasized, promoting these so-called humanist values actually

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<sup>9</sup>This view is found in some of the genre's earliest criticism as well as in the more contemporary work of critics such as Donald Pizer. See, for instance, *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism* which includes writings from turn-of-the-century literary critics in addition to Pizer's own analyses.

works to serve particular class interests. Moreover, in conceiving persons as autonomous, self-determining agents free from constraints, liberal humanism tends to de-emphasize persons' interdependency and the ethical obligations and resources that might follow from it.

I propose instead that through their treatments of embodied experience, many of the literary texts typically read as "naturalist" present alternative conceptions of personhood that feature embodiment as a primary feature. These conceptions place pressure on liberal humanist notions of personhood, as I explore further in the chapters. I am not the first to suggest that texts usually read within a naturalist canon can be interpreted as critiques of liberal individualist philosophies positing the individual's freedom from economic constraints. As Donald Pease has recently noted, "Literary Naturalists were never enraptured with liberal individualism as a political ideal" and so the genre has been "able to expose liberal individualism as the effect of the very regulatory mechanisms which the literary romance had opposed" ("Psychoanalyzing the Narrative Logics of Naturalism: *The Call of the Wild*" 14). However, my study substantially extends such an argument by examining how the body in particular, for some turn-of-the-century writers, serves as an alternate and valuable basis for personhood.

Novels such as *White Fang* and *Vandover and the Brute* figure bodies not merely as regrettable marks of a regressive animal nature, but as integral and valuable components of "human-animals." Indeed, as I suggest in Chapter 2, adopting an animal style of being in the world might serve useful purposes. Some literary criticism, such as Kelly Hurley's study of fin-de-siecle Gothic literature in Britain and Fleissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*, has indeed marked a productive rethinking of turn-of-the-century writers' interests in the materiality of bodies. Fleissner, in particular, argues that post-Darwinian understandings in which all human beings are subjected to physical as well as social

forces make possible narratives in which men and women alike must “work with and manage the facts of” their existence as embodied beings (22). I see my present work in this dissertation as part of these critics’ important move towards thinking about novels as something other than instruments involved in producing and maintaining a liberal humanist or bourgeois subject defined by features noted above (Hurley 8). At the same time, however, Fleissner and Hurley still seem to conceive of persons’ corporeality as a kind of “equal-opportunity” constraint, rather than as an important medium for connection among bodies. Their studies do not address the ways in which turn-of-the-century writers imagine the body as more than a mere obstruction. My own study makes use of contemporary critical and theoretical work on embodiment to help bring this aspect of the literary texts into sharper focus.

Although I do not argue that the literary depictions of embodiment I examine are solely a product of historical conditions, I would like to suggest, as I alluded to a moment ago, a few possibilities that may serve to at least partially account for why the ethical possibilities of corporeality might have emerged as a particular preoccupation for writers of this era. I offer these speculations partly in the interest of proposing that it may not be terribly far-fetched to imagine that turn-of-the-century writers shared some of the concerns of later 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century intellectuals. In suggesting that turn-of-the-century novels’ focus on the materiality of bodies has been strongly influenced by a broader Western cultural awareness of materialist reality within an increasingly secularized, post-evolutionary late nineteenth century, Hurley and Fleissner usefully indicate some degree of historical specificity surrounding fictional renderings of the body in turn-of-the-century texts that I also find operating in texts I examine (Hurley 32). I believe this explanation can profit a bit more from considering the potential influence of



writings by Herbert Spencer and William James on these authors' works which I do briefly in Chapter 1.

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Besides offering new readings of some canonical American texts, my study may also be significant in light of recent Americanist work on affect in the fields of literary and cultural studies. I argue here that the literary texts I examine suggest that persons might be bound to one another via their status as embodied beings. Studies by Peter Coviello and Lauren Berlant propose that a tendency toward affiliation or "connectedness-to-others" manifests itself in different forms throughout U.S. literature. Coviello explains, "modern nationality acquires meaning and gravity not least as a quality of relation: as an affect or attachment, a feeling of mutual belonging that somehow transpires between strangers" (4). For Coviello's study of U.S. antebellum authors, the language of race provides coherence to an American citizenry "fusing them into what we might call an affect-nation" (5).<sup>10</sup> As Coviello points out, the notion of an "intimate, affectively-rooted American nationality" extends far beyond the antebellum period. Berlant, in particular, has proposed the notion of a "traumatic nationality," by which citizens' capacity for suffering connects them to one another. Berlant and others ascribe a mixed value to

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<sup>10</sup>Coviello argues that part of the appeal in such a means of unification is that it can circumvent the state: "[The language of race] gives even those who revile the state a way to believe in a unified, incarnate America, one whose substance is not the government and its institutions but the specifically affective ties that knit its citizens, its white citizens, into lived cohesion" (5). Dana Nelson's *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Fraternity of White Men* similarly takes up the importance of race as an instrument of national unity in antebellum America: "The national need to cultivate 'sameness' was threatened by the differences structured not only through the variety of ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds of the colonial population, and the regional, colonial, and state affiliations that they had come to enjoy, but by the very market economy that supposedly ensured the nation's health" (6). Nelson further concludes that "'White manhood' was a useful category for inventing national unity because it abstracted men's interests out of local issues and identities in an appeal to a nationally shared 'nature'" (7).

affect as a force of unification among citizens: “An affective nationality rooted in wounding and bereavement promises to circumvent the unwanted discrimination and antidemocratic exclusivity of previous nation-languages, then, but it does so at a certain cost to citizenship itself. What results is a nation-language in which mutuality has grown increasingly separate from obligation, where national belonging no longer carries with it any but the thinnest of ethical demands” (Coviello 173).<sup>11</sup> To the extent that shared suffering is feature of the text I examine, it may prove useful to consider whether or not they can be said to participate in this tradition.

I noted at the outset of this introduction that my project employs postmodern phenomenology in approaching the novels I examine and I have tried to elaborate why I find such a perspective productive and appropriate. At the same time, I want to underscore that the literary texts offer insights of their own that might better allow the ethical potential of theories of embodiment to come to fruition. The body’s facilitation of connection between persons proposed by phenomenologists can only be fully realized if embodiment is not suppressed as a central feature of personhood. In according significant attention to their characters’ embodied status, the authors in my study encourage somatic attentiveness that resists this kind of potentially damaging suppression. Moreover, the novels dramatize some of the major challenges involved in realizing the body’s potential, including the re-working of familiar narratives of

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<sup>11</sup>The classic example cited by Berlant and others is the appeal to a mother’s pain of losing a child in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* which is intended to provide a common basis between whites and African Americans by which white women may sympathize with enslaved women. However, Berlant argues that the particularity of the slaves’ pain can be obscured along with its structural causes: “...we usually lose the original impulse behind sentimental politics, which is to see the individual effects of mass social violence as different from the causes, which are impersonal and depersonalizing” (*The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* 42). For related critiques of sentimentalism, see, for instance, Shirley Samuels’s *The Culture of Sentiment* and Glenn Hendler’s introduction to *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*.

development and attention to the ways in which the organization of social spaces can promote or inhibit the capacities of bodies.

In Chapter 1, I explore the ways in which London's *Martin Eden* emphasizes corporeality as a central feature of personhood. I describe at the outset of this chapter phenomenological conceptions of embodiment offered by Merleau-Ponty and his readers that I feel usefully illuminate the significance of London's depictions of bodies. I focus, in particular, on London's rendering of Martin's rich sensory encounters with women and their impact upon his character development. I further suggest the ways in which London's references to reading, writing, and aesthetics in *Martin Eden* encourage reading practices in which readers might be especially attentive to their own embodied status and their relations with other bodies.

Chapters 2 and 3 center on novels by London, Norris, and Dreiser presenting atypical cases of embodiment—the animal body and the pregnant body—as ethical resources. As I argue in Chapter 2, the canine body in London's *White Fang* represents a distinctly connective orientation or relation to one's surroundings, including other embodied beings. This chapter situates London's novel in relation to other fictional modes of representing animals, such as the talking animal story, as well as to a lesser-known context of popular periodical fiction in late nineteenth century. In emphasizing embodiment as a shared condition of humans and animals, *White Fang* indicates the potential value of humans' adoption of an animal-style of being in the world.

Akin to London's deployment of canine corporeality, Norris and Dreiser feature the pregnant body figure in their male-centered bildungsromans as I explore in Chapter 3. In Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* and Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, the traditional trajectory of a male protagonist's development is undermined by the pregnancy of a working-class woman

character. Drawing on the figure of the pregnant body, these novels rework familiar narratives of masculine development. The novels trace their male protagonists' altered course of development that emphasizes instead their sensitivity to the experience of other bodies. As *Vandover and the Brute* and *An American Tragedy* are frequently cited as classic instances of literary naturalism, I emphasize in this chapter that these novels' depictions of corporeality defy the notion common to traditional and contemporary interpretations of naturalism that the body necessarily limits persons' capacities for insight and connection to one another.

I argue in Chapter 4 that Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* lends further support to but also substantially complicates the ideas concerning embodiment taken up by London, Norris, and Dreiser's fiction. Along with these writers, Chesnutt suggests that persons' embodied status warrants recognition since the body constitutes a vital medium for connection to other bodies. However, his novel crucially reveals that a body's capacities and ethical promise can be compromised by the organization of social spaces. In the post-Reconstruction context of Chesnutt's novel, racial segregation constitutes a prime instance of this type of constraint. In conversation with his African American contemporaries concerned to analyze the escalation of the lynching crisis during a particularly grim moment for African Americans at the turn of the century, Chesnutt indicates a relationship between the limited cross-racial sympathies sustained by segregation to the rise of spectacle lynching in *The Marrow of Tradition*.

## 1.0 STIRRING SOMATIC ATTENTION IN JACK LONDON'S *MARTIN EDEN*

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way? (Emily Dickinson, 1870)

From virtually the moment Martin Eden enters the home of the cultured Morse family at the opening of London's 1909 novel, Martin resolves to fit in with the "exalted beings" he encounters there and to "rise to that sublimated realm where dwelt the upper classes." Setting on a course to becoming a voracious reader and a prolific author, Martin eventually manages to transcend his former working-class status. Working steadfastly to identify himself chiefly in terms of his mind and creativity, Martin, as Susan Bordo might say, initially aims to define himself as that which is "not-body" (5). Ironically, in his characterization of Martin, London works to depict his protagonist as a body markedly sensitive to other bodies; Martin frequently reflects on his encounters with the bodies of women, in particular, and comes to demonstrate significant concern for them in the course of the novel. By the novel's end, Martin the celebrated author is bombarded with attention from readers, some of whom he recalls as having been utterly oblivious and insensitive to his prior impoverished state. Martin's interactions with these readers raises a question that comes to disturb and downright haunt him: why isn't simply being a body enough to merit the care and concern of others? In this chapter, I explore the ways in London's treatment of embodiment in the *Martin Eden* emphasizes the value in claiming

corporeality as a central feature of personhood. My focus on the ways in which Martin's interactions with women's bodies productively impacts his character development counters some recent criticism of the novel that argues Martin's misogynist attitudes, particularly towards working-class women, arise from London's "love of masculinity."<sup>12</sup> I suggest furthermore that London's self-reflexive references to readers and authors, as well as to literature and other aesthetic mediums, furthermore encourages an ethics of reading and writing concerned with somatic attentiveness and retuning our ways of being bodies in relation.

*Martin Eden* follows Jack London's title character, a working-class man, in his related efforts to become a fiction writer and to win the affection of Ruth Morse, a young woman from a relatively well-to-do family. Although at first aspiring to gain entry into Ruth's social class, Martin quickly becomes disillusioned with what he comes to regard as "bourgeois" attitudes and values. At the same time, he grows increasingly troubled by his alienation from his former working-class culture. Despite eventually attaining considerable success as a writer, Martin commits suicide by the novel's end.

Martin's early ruminations on his literary projects intimate ideas about relationships among the body, its surroundings, and fiction that prove central to broader concerns of the novel. Describing Martin's initial attempts to work out the contours of his authorial vision, the narrator states:

[Martin] was amazed at the immense amount of printed stuff that was dead. No light, no life, no color, was shot through it. There was no breath of life in it...He

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<sup>12</sup>Derrick suggests that London's celebration of masculinity has a distinctly homoerotic cast and he argues that Martin's denigration of working-class women's bodies as the "place of fluid, odor, and warmth" is intertwined with same-sex desires that he must repress in his claim to an "upwardly mobile heterosexuality" reinforced by the marriage plot (121-128). I find this argument interesting, but I do not see that it holds up given the way the novel unfolds (both in terms of the foiled marriage plot and in terms of Martin's development of sensitivity toward working-class women's bodies that I will examine).

was puzzled by countless short stories, written lightly and cleverly he confessed, but without vitality or reality. Life was so strange and wonderful, filled with an immensity of problems, of dreams, and of heroic toils, and yet these stories dealt only with the commonplaces of life. He felt the stress and strain of life, its fevers and sweats and wild insurgences—surely this was the stuff to write about! (99).

Casting fiction as a space infused with animation, Martin's vision draws on somatic language of breath, fevers, and sweats to figure the body as an indicator of literary significance. What stimulates or stirs the body, in other words, seems to him a most fruitful subject for fiction. Martin's meditations on the subject of fiction points to a possible purpose directed toward readers of London's novels as well. Consider also the following description of Martin upon reading his story to Ruth: "He noted her pale face, her eyes wide and tense, and her clenched hands, with secret satisfaction. He had succeeded" (105). As he eventually resorts to selling his writing to magazines, Martin's literary principles are severely undermined, causing him great anguish. Pressed to conform to market demands, he receives a telling directive to remove the "guts" from his writing (236). There is a need, London seems to suggest through Martin's self-reflexive moments as a writer, for readers' bodies to be stirred and, as we will later see, for their senses to be retuned.

While some critics might be inclined to read Martin's musings on literature as bold assertions of masculinity over and against feminized "commonplaces of life" appearing in domestic fiction, I want to suggest an alternate way of understanding this interest in animate life as a literary subject.<sup>13</sup> In particular, I find something significant at stake in Martin's sense of the

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<sup>13</sup>In this context, see especially Campbell (5-6). Campbell posits naturalism as a reaction against feminized genres such as regionalism in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries. Campbell builds on by-now familiar arguments concerning the number of male-authored texts in the nineteenth century thought to be rejections

body as an entity responsively in contact with life outside itself and his wish to capture this sense in writing. Offering a more explicit statement of his desire, Martin tells Ruth: “. . . Sometimes it seems to me that all the world, all life, everything, had taken up residence inside of me and was clamoring for me to be the spokesman. I feel—oh, I can’t describe it—I feel the bigness of it, but when I speak I babble like a little child. It is a great task to transmute feeling and sensation into speech, written or spoken, that will, in turn, in him who reads or listens, transmute itself back into the selfsame feeling and sensation” (102). Again, though we might dwell on the totalizing terms in which Martin speaks as evidence of masculinist egocentrism, I want to draw attention here to his idea that fiction might be employed to express the opening of oneself to the surrounding world as part of an effort to stimulate readers’ own sensations. It is this idea, in fact, that I want to suggest lies at the center of London’s exploration of the body as a center of consciousness or awareness in *Martin Eden*. Although we are not privy to direct examples of Martin’s writing, his sense of “life” and “the world” inhabiting himself and inexorably informing his prospective literary creations finds notable expression in London’s corporeal depictions of Martin at the novel’s outset. As the novel emphasizes, Martin’s heightened awareness of himself as a body seems to provide a stronger basis for connection to the materiality of the outside world, including the materiality of other “body-objects” he encounters. As Judith Butler explains, “the embodied status of the ‘I’ is precisely that which implicates the ‘I’ in a fleshly world outside of itself, that is, in a world in which the ‘I’ is no longer its own center or ground” (“Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics” 69). Not an ego acting against a world utterly external to it,

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of feminine influence. Notably, Jennifer Fleissner in *Women, Compulsion, and Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* convincingly contests such readings in turn-of-the-century literature by pointing out continuities between regionalism and naturalism (75-21).



Martin is portrayed as much more permeable or open to the world outside himself, a permeability which seems to profoundly shape some of the recognitions and insights he comes to in the novel.

Analyses of embodiment in *Martin Eden* have centered primarily on Martin's portrayal in the novel's opening scenes. Notably, Martin's depictions in these scenes has been central to a number of analyses of *Martin Eden*, and some critics have, in fact, deemed his characterization representative of a tendency in "naturalist" literature more generally. Working with rather limited conceptions of embodiment, however, these accounts fail to appreciate the complexities and potential effects of fictional treatments of the body by writers such as London. Critics often interpret Martin's bodily awkwardness in early scenes of the novel as evidence that he is, in effect, placed on display for middle-class characters' and readers' contemplation. June Howard suggests, in particular, that naturalist novels inscribe social-class relationships by configuring the dynamics among readers and characters along a mind-body continuum. Strongly influenced by Georg Lukacs's "Narrate or Describe?" Howard incorporates into her analysis his materialist notion that naturalism describes persons as objects fixed or entrapped within a social scene who concomitantly lack freedom to change the course of events (differing significantly, for Lukacs, from the genre of realism, which narrates the activity of characters who draw on inner resources in attempting to triumph over limits imposed by the social structure). Although not motivated to elevate realism over naturalism in the way that Lukacs is, Howard extends his observations to posit that naturalist novels place the bodies of typically working-class characters on display as the objects—especially as "brutes"—of middle-class readers' contemplation. Howard suggests that these readers, along with a few "spectator" characters who serve as readerly surrogates are credited with insights into the lives of brute characters that the brute characters themselves lack. In this formulation, readers occupy a kind of transcendent space, remaining detached from

embodied characters. Howard's alignment of vision and mind is especially notable since the eye is the exceptional body part often granted a privileged role in cognition and thought in Western conceptions (Brooks 96).<sup>14</sup> Readers as the active minds or "eyes" are thus placed in direct opposition to passive, embodied characters who are objects of sight rather than subjects of seeing. While Howard herself expresses some ambivalence about reading *Martin Eden* in strict relation to naturalist tropes, given that Martin's desire to transcend his working-class status would not be typical of mere brute characters, some recent criticism of the novel takes largely for granted that the novel places Martin's body on display for both middle-class characters and readers (Kim 1-2).<sup>15</sup>

At the heart of this critical framework is an important interpretive question about fiction that I find to be strongly influenced by assumptions about mind-body relations. Specifically, critics' Cartesian presumptions have governed their interpretations of free indirect discourse, a dominant fictional mode employed in the texts under discussion here. As Mieke Bal observes, in free indirect discourse, it remains uncertain whether readers are presented with the narrator's or characters' perceptions. Confronted with this ambiguity, critics such as Howard assume that readers encounter the disembodied narrator's perceptions, revealing a questionable Cartesian privileging of mind over body. Readers as extensions of the narrator are thought to share in the perceptions and stance of a disembodied narrator and are thus distanced or detached from embodied characters, contributing to the consolidation of class distinctions I noted above. However, if we recognize the ambiguous state of free indirect discourse as Bal defines it,

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<sup>14</sup>Along this line, Anthony Synott points out that mind and sight are strongly aligned in everyday expressions denoting comprehension, such as "I see" (148).

<sup>15</sup>Kim argues here that Martin's status as an object for middle-class audiences aligns him with the colonized subject.

Howard's framework no longer holds. Instead, a relation other than separation or detachment between readers and embodied characters becomes possible. Indeed, as I will suggest in my reading of London, writers' attention to embodiment works to foster interconnection between reader and character precisely via shared embodiment.<sup>16</sup>

London's portrayals of embodiment in *Martin Eden* resonate quite strikingly with the markedly anti-Cartesian body that Merleau-Ponty and many of his readers have helped to conceptualize. In Merleau-Ponty's conception, the lived body is inextricably bound up or "caught up" with an experienced world and oriented toward it: "Whenever I try to understand myself the whole fabric of the perceptible world comes too, and with it come the others who are caught in it" (*Signs* 15).<sup>17</sup> Not merely an entity set against the backdrop of the world, the body constitutes instead "our general medium for having a world at all" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 169). As Carol Bigwood observes, the body in Merleau-Ponty's paradigm is a sentience born together with its surroundings that remains actively and continually in touch with them, a body that "continually emerges anew out of an ever changing weave of relations to the environment, things, tasks, and other bodies" (Bigwood 105).

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<sup>16</sup>It is worth dwelling a moment here, if only to speculate on the basis of Howard's influential study, on differing attitudes toward embodiment in turn-of-the-century authors, on the one hand, and contemporary critics on the other. As their writings seem to indicate, writers such as London may have enjoyed greater acceptance of their embodied status and, as a result, may have been more inclined to appreciate some of the possibilities inhering in corporeality. Perhaps more wary of their own immersion in embodiment, some contemporary critics seem less attuned to these possibilities and, consequently, less equipped to recognize this dimension of turn-of-the-century writers' works. Notable exceptions here, of course, might include critics influenced by feminist theory, for as I pointed out in the introduction, attention to the body has been crucial to this area of inquiry.

<sup>17</sup> Remarking on the body's tendency toward a commingling with the things of the world, Merleau-Ponty states: "The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us of the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world" (*The Visible and the Invisible* 136).

More elaborate explanation for the body's openness to the world lies in what Merleau-Ponty names the flesh, a condition of embodiment marked by "reversibility," or the body's ambiguous status as both material object and perceiving subject.<sup>18</sup> "My body is at once a phenomenal body and objective body," he remarks (*The Visible and the Invisible* 137). The oft-cited example of two hands (belonging to the same body) touching one another exemplifies the body's capacity to apprehend itself as both subject and object: when my right hand touches my left hand, my left hand is perceived as an object, but once my left hand feels itself being touched it becomes a perceiving subject and the right hand becomes the object. Important to emphasize is the shifting nature of this bodily experience. Merleau-Ponty underscores the "miscarrying" that creates a gap, or "chiasm," as he explains, "If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand" (*The Visible and the Invisible* 9). Since the body cannot touch itself and feel itself being touched at exactly the same moment, it can never become a closed system; this explains why the body can continually remain open to the influence of the surrounding world. As some critics have pointed out, this chiasmic opening can be likened to the "point of entry for the call or force of interpellation" and as a medium for the disciplinary processes described by Foucault (Doyle xxiii).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>As indicated here, Merleau-Ponty stresses that flesh is not substance, but instead an "element" of dynamic being (*The Visible and the Invisible* 139-140).

<sup>19</sup>Doyle further argues that the body's vulnerability "only confirms the volatile chiasm's importance for political agency" (*Bodies of Resistance* xxiii).

Perhaps the most significant insight offered in this account of embodiment for recent readers of Merleau-Ponty's work, though, are the potential effects of the body as a basis for connection with the fleshly world outside itself. Here, the body's capacity to apprehend itself as both subject and object with near (albeit never exact) simultaneity proves key. Underscoring the object pole of somatic experience, Maurice Hamington notes, "Because of the ambiguity of subject and object in my body's experience of its perceptual world, I am able to perceive and reflect on my own body. It may slip into invisibility when I focus on sensory experience, but awareness of my own body always resurfaces. The body's reversibility not only allows it to open the world to me but also allows me to view my body as an object in that world" (54). The major implication of this ambiguous corporeal status, as he goes on to indicate, is revealed in the body's confrontation of other embodied beings:

When the flesh confronts other bodies as objects in the world, its reversibility allows for an ambiguous, limited understanding of the other body. The other body that I perceive is also subject and object. I recognize its form (a body) and movements (its habits) and immediately I have a level of shared knowledge that is both tacit and explicit. When my body confronts another, even if it is a foreign body attired and socially constructed differently from my own, there is still a fundamental connection and understanding in the flesh. . . (54)

This sense of bodily doubleness seems to hold promise for the forging of connections among bodies on the basis of shared somaticity. Since the body experiences itself as both object and subject, when it encounters another body—ostensibly another "object"—the resemblance it perceives will authorize it to attribute to that body the capacity for a subjective experience

analogous to its own (Rogozinski 11).<sup>20</sup> Jacob Rogozinski notes that the act of conferring upon another body “the sense of being flesh which I first perceive in mine” is what enables the incorporation of other bodies into one’s own and potentially “seals the bond of our carnal community” (11). Hamington helpfully refers to the self’s process of incorporating other bodies as “corporeal continuity”; I find this term useful for my analyses of London’s text later in this chapter and in the chapters that follow.

As Rogozinski notes, a serious obstacle to the development of such communal relations, or corporeal continuity, among bodies arises in the tendency of persons to avoid identification with the full condition of embodiment, evading particularly the material, object-pole of corporeality. Recognizing this inclination and its effect, he remarks that persons generally rid themselves of this pole of experience by projecting it onto other bodies, notably bodies marked by sex, race, and other differences: “Every perception of dissimilarity between our two bodies, every discovery of (sexual, racial, and so on) difference risks interrupting this double transference, risks dissolving our nascent community by rejecting the other body as nonflesh—possessing the strangeness of an abject flesh-thing” (21).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, it seems to follow that recognizing one’s own body as partly a flesh-thing, or material object, would overcome the propensity for projecting this pole of corporeality wholly onto another body.

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<sup>20</sup>Rogozinski elaborates, “A horizontal synthesis occurs on the second axis as soon as each pole overcomes the carnal difference separating it from the other person and transfers onto what first appeared as this foreign thing its own fleshliness, recognizing the other as flesh of its flesh” (14). The notion of analogy referred to above seems important here. Distinct from identical, it suggests that this process entails not the simple transference of one’s own socially and culturally-inflected perceptions to another, but instead grants the possibility of a subjective experience of the body different from one’s own. Hamington also points out that the notion of corporeal continuity ought not to be confused with colonization; I will return specifically to this issue later in the chapter.

<sup>21</sup>This formulation and the notion of the abject, in particular, intersects also with Julia Kristeva’s writings on the self in relation to others. See, for example, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1-31). I will take up the link between phenomenological accounts of embodiment and Kristeva’s writings on ethics in more depth in Chapter 3.

I will take up the ways in which knowledge of and relation to others via embodiment plays a central role in *Martin Eden* in subsequent sections of this chapter. I turn first, though, to examining the novel's early depictions of Martin. Far from a mere object on display for characters and readers, Martin's body exemplifies the lived body par excellence. What early portions of the novel capture through this portrayal is Martin's incipient apprehension of his embodied status as both object and subject. That is, he literally appears to himself as both material object and perceiving subject. London, in this way, constitutes personhood in markedly somatic terms. No doubt, the presence of middle-class characters in the novel's opening scenes incites or shapes Martin's consciousness of his body's materiality, its "object-like" quality. At the same time, however, the stress placed on Martin's recognition of embodiment's object pole suggests a tentative incorporation of this aspect of bodily experience into his conception of self. Relating Martin's heightened consciousness, the narrator notes, "His heavy arms hung loosely at his sides. He did not know what to do with those arms and hands, and when, to his excited vision, one arm seemed liable to brush against the books on the table, he lurched away like a frightened horse, barely missing the piano stool" (32). More explicitly integrating this aspect of corporeal experience into Martin's self-conception, the narrator remarks, "All his life, up to then, he had been unaware of being either graceful or awkward. Such thoughts of self had never entered his mind. He sat down gingerly on the edge of the chair, greatly worried by his hands. They were in the way wherever he put them" (37). An extended passage detailing Martin's apprehension of himself in a mirror similarly reinforces this connection between self and body. The following excerpt prefaces a lengthy catalogue of Martin's somatic features, as the narrator begins: "It was the first time he had ever really seen himself. His eyes were made for seeing, but up to that moment they had been filled with the ever-changing panorama of the world, at

which he had been too busy gazing, ever to gaze at himself. He saw the head and face of a young fellow of twenty, but being unused to such appraisal, he did not know how to value it” (67). Further linking the literal material of the body to self-conceptualization, London expresses here Martin’s capacity for understanding himself as an object in the world at which he gazes, echoing statements about the lived body cited earlier. As the passage suspends judgment of the body’s “worth,” Martin’s awareness of his body need not be interpreted as simply confirming his oppressed status and solidifying his separation from other characters and from readers. Rather, the language of the text suggests that an awareness of one’s own body as object constitutes a central component of more general attentiveness to bodily experience.

Indeed, moments in which Martin appears to himself as a sensing or perceiving body come to play a vital role in underscoring the value of attending to somatic experience. Depictions of Martin’s subjective experience of the world via the body resonate even more profoundly and suggestively with a phenomenological sense of the body’s permeability or openness to the world. Following Ruth’s brother into the Morse family home, Martin, a sailor at the novel’s start, “walked at the other’s heels with a swing to his shoulders, and his legs spread unwittingly, as if the level floors were tilting up and sinking down to the heave and lunge of the sea. The wide rooms seemed too narrow for his rolling gait, and to himself he was in terror lest his broad shoulders should collide with the doorways or sweep the bric-a-brac from the low mantel” (31). Accentuating the ways in which Martin’s prior immersion in a working-class environment shapes his present attempts to orient himself in new surroundings, this figuration also illustrates Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the subject’s “habitual being-in-the-world,” or what Donn Welton simplifies as the habitual body. This conception extends the notion of the body’s openness to the world; the subject’s habitual-being-in-the-world refers partly to the



“sedimentation” of history and social conventions. The body brings to each new encounter in the world a “corporeal memory” strongly informed by such conventions. As Welton explains, “The notion of the habitual body carries what we mean by the flesh, that side of our character most related to the palpable context or environment in which we find ourselves. We always approach that environment with a body bearing the sediment of past experience. It has corporeal memory and thus brings anticipations of its own rooted in its habitual style of assimilating things” (239).<sup>22</sup>

More than simply emblemizing the habitual body Merleau-Ponty describes, though, London builds on this feature of embodiment to suggest additional effects of corporeal memory. A unique and recurring element of London’s novel are passages that disrupt narrative flow and, as the above passage previews, arouse corporeal memory, especially sensations associated with Martin’s working-class background. Donald Pease has argued that, in marking a rift between Martin’s new subjectivity within the Morse home and his former subject position, these passages show Martin undergoing an irreparable separation from these previous experiences (154).<sup>23</sup> For

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<sup>22</sup>Characterizing sensation as a “reconstitution” and pointing out the presence of “sediments” of past constitutions, Merleau-Ponty explains: “As for the subject of sensation, he need not be a pure nothingness with no terrestrial weight. That would be necessary only if, like constituting consciousness, he had to be simultaneously omnipresent, coextensive with being, and in process of thinking universal truth. But the spectacle perceived does not partake of pure being. Taken exactly as I see it, it is a moment of my individual history, and since sensation is a reconstitution, it pre-supposes in me sediments left behind by some previous constitution, so that I am, as a sentient subject, a repository stocked with natural powers at which I am the first to be filled with wonder” (*The Phenomenology of Perception* 249).

<sup>23</sup>Specifically, Pease interprets this splitting as an effect of interpellation wherein Martin assumes a new subject position upon being addressed as “Mr. Eden” by Ruth’s brother: “After being called ‘Mr. Eden,’ ‘Eden’ comes unhinged as the bearer of lived history that the name he has just been called cannot interiorize. This disjoining splits ‘Mr. Eden’ off from the contingent individual ‘Eden’ and then positions this uninteriorized name in the position of a ‘camera obscura,’ from whose external viewpoint ‘he’ watches scenes from Eden’s lived historicity come apart from the subject in whom they had formerly constituted an interiority” (“*Martin Eden* and the Limits of the Aesthetic Experience” 154). I think that Pease assumes too rigid a demarcation between interiority and corporeality here and that the novel, as I argue, works to confound these very categories in the interest of dramatizing the workings of embodied consciousness.

other critics, passages such as these attest to the debilitating sense of displacement typical of class-crossing characters in narratives of upward mobility.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to both arguments, I find that these passages emphasize Martin's immersion in, not his detachment from, corporeal memory and that London points beyond personal discomfort to more significant effects of Martin's attentiveness to the disjunctions he perceives. Specifically, these passages suggest the value of understanding oneself as a perceiving body: via corporeal memory, a perceiving body literally brings with it another "lifeworld" that might function to interrogate or produce disruption to one's perceptions of one's present surroundings and potentially to those surroundings themselves. Illustrating a fluidity between past and present perceptions, the text emphasizes that perceptual experience is not bound to the present moment and thus suggests that the perceiving body provides a resource for present insight and future action. London assigns a markedly disruptive force to these passages that illustrate the arousal of corporeal memory. For example, as Martin watches Ruth's mother, the narrator remarks, "She and her dress together reminded him of women on the stage. Then he remembered seeing similar grand ladies and gowns entering the London theatres while he stood and watched and the policemen shoved him back into the drizzle beyond the awning" (44). Here, the body's receptivity to a heterogeneous world seems to foster, in particular, heightened sensitivity to extreme disparities in the experiences and conditions of bodies. Similarly, consider the following passage which expresses something of a Proustian reversal:

The process of getting into the dining room was a nightmare to him. Between halts and stumbles, jerks and lurches, locomotion had at times seemed impossible.

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<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Christopher Renny's "From Rags, to Riches, to Suicide: Unhappy Narratives of Upward Mobility: *Martin Eden*, *Bread Givers*, *Delia's Song* and *Hunger for Memory*" and John DeCaire's "The Boys Books of Despair."

But at last he had made it, and was seated alongside of [Ruth]. The array of knives and forks frightened him. They bristled with unknown perils, and he gazed at them fascinated, till their dazzle became a background across which moved a succession of fore-castle pictures, wherein he and his mates sat eating salt beef with sheath-knives and fingers, or scooping thick pea-soup out of pannikins by means of battered iron spoons. The stench of bad beef was in his nostrils, while in his ears, to the accompaniment of creaking timbers and groaning bulkheads, echoed the loud mouth-noises of the eaters. (45)

As in the passage just cited, what emerges in this encounter of past and present lifeworlds via the perceiving body is the recognition of vivid discrepancies in bodily experiences. The corporeal awareness underlined in these passages not only provides evidence of Martin's sense of dislocation or discomfort, but instead illustrates the body's participation in generating revelations potentially disruptive to the status quo. For readers, moreover, these passages encourage a stopping or pausing over somatic disparities themselves as well as moments in which such disparities are revealed to a perceiving body.

Emphasis on non-visual modes of perception within these passages reinforce London's construction of personhood in corporeal terms. As I will discuss further momentarily, London's depictions of non-visual perceptions imply an immersive, as opposed to a separative or detached, quality. For instance, that the sensations of his prior experience depicted in the remainder of the passage are described as being *in* his nostrils and ears mark the extent of their influence in penetrating Martin's present experience. Denoted by the repetition of verbs in the present tense, the sensuous activities of eating, scooping, creaking, and groaning lend a greater sense of immediacy and simple presence to Martin's past perceptions. In these opening scenes, London

more firmly binds the perceiving body with its corporeal memories to depictions of Martin. In effect, then, these passages negate the possibility of detachment from or evasion of this feature of embodiment.

In addition, the text's ways of figuring Martin's character might encourage readers' imaginative immersion in his bodily experience. I proposed earlier that rejecting the Cartesian bias operating in some critics' interpretations of free indirect discourse allows us to challenge the notion that readers are necessarily detached from a character's embodiment in turn-of-the-century fiction.<sup>25</sup> In foregrounding Martin's embodiment, London lays the groundwork for prompting connection between readers and characters on the basis of shared somaticity, or a sense of corporeal continuity. The novel's accounts of embodied consciousness that I have been tracing here do not simply provide readers with points of identification with a character's thoughts or mind, but instead bring readers into imagined contact with movements, sensations, and perceptions of the flesh. To more fully appreciate the implications of this reading, it is first necessary to consider the novel's stagings of corporeal continuity which elaborate the perceiving body as a medium for connection with other bodies.

London's portrayals of Martin's relations to other bodies, particularly women's bodies, constitute insightful stagings of corporeal continuity in which the body serves as a medium for connection with other embodied beings. In these passages, Martin continues to appear to himself as a perceiving body, but this body is now notably permeated by an overwhelming sense of women's embodied experiences. The passages I examine in this section contain the same notably disruptive quality as those discussed in the previous section. Non-visual sense

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<sup>25</sup>Again, some literary critics formed by the Cartesian tradition may have sought to distance themselves from this corporeal level of the narrative and may have perhaps, in turn, questionably attributed such distancing to the texts themselves.

perceptions additionally play a central role in emphasizing Martin's incorporation of the women's perceptions into his own.

Before continuing, though, it is important for me to clarify some of my assumptions concerning literary representations of visual and non-visual modes of perception. I want to suggest that *Martin Eden*, as well as several other literary texts I explore in subsequent chapters reveal, in particular, qualities of non-visual experience that provide opportunities for meaningful connection to the experiences of others. While my study highlights this aspect of the novels, I do not mean to suggest that visual modalities do not contain some of these same qualities or that human reliance on vision necessarily or always figures into a problematic epistemological or ethical stance emphasizing persons' separateness or disconnection from one another. Indeed, psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories have offered sophisticated and productive accounts of visual experience by which we can better appreciate the ways in which vision can also encourage a similar sense of corporeal continuity among persons.<sup>26</sup> When I suggest, however, that non-visual experiences tend to more strongly immerse a person in or connect that person to his or her surroundings, I mean to say that non-visual impressions are in a way less to "escape" or to detach oneself from than visual impressions. While we can avert our eyes to find relief from a disturbing scene, for instance, it is often less easy to ignore or evade sounds or

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<sup>26</sup>Lacanian psychoanalytic accounts of the "gaze," characterized by "seeing another seeing you," for instance, may undoubtedly exert powerful affects on insight and action. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* also articulates features of vision that potentially inspire a sense of mutual belonging to "the visible world": "Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world. . . . If we accept that we can see that hill over there, we propose that from that hill we can be seen. The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogues is an attempt to verbalize this—an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, 'you see thing', and an attempt to discover how 'he sees things'" (9). Merleau-Ponty also recognizes this quality with a related example wherein "this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades [another's] vision without quitting my own, I recognized in my green his green, as the customs officer recognizes suddenly in a traveler the man whose description he had been given. There is here no problem of the alter ego because it is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us. . ." (*The Visible and the Invisible* 142).

noise. Moreover, I find that the literary representations themselves depict non-visual perceptions as having a tendency to penetrate and make particularly powerful impressions on their characters. In this way, the novels point to non-visual sensations and perceptions as ethical resources that have perhaps been overlooked given that a strong reliance on non-visual senses has not typically been associated with human ways of operating, an idea I especially take up in Chapter 2.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, though, it may be useful to imagine that non-visual experiences might serve to supplement, rather than substitute, the work of visual modalities.

In London's novel, Martin's first encounter with Ruth brings to his mind a litany of women from his past whom he deems far inferior by comparison: "The women he had known! Immediately, beside her, on either hand, ranged the women he had known. For an eternal second he stood in the midst of a portrait gallery, wherein she occupied the central place, while about her were limned many women, all to be weighed and measured by a fleeting glance, herself the unit of weight and measure" (36). The visual primarily serves here as Martin's tool in building a hierarchy of women. His recollections detail a provocative spectrum of women that includes "weak and sickly faces of the girls of the factories" along with the "full-bodied South-Sea-Island

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<sup>27</sup>Here, there is also an important historical component to consider with regard to the exercise of vision in modernity. Marxist-inflected criticism, in particular, has underscored an overemphasis on vision in modernity, as critics have called attention to the fact that, "In a new social formation where all men and women were to be addressed as potential consumers, reality had to be recreated 'in the mode of theatrical display, of spectacle'" (Mariani 8). Moreover, critics such as Guy Debord have emphasized the contemplative stance of detachment from what one sees encouraged by this means of consumer address. Debord notes in *The Society of the Spectacle*, "Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a *partial* way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation" (12). Such accounts suggest that, given these conditions, over-reliance on visual modes of relating to one's surroundings may contribute to a potentially problematic passive stance of detachment. In the context of literature, for example, Howard's "spectator" figure of naturalism who is differentiated from the "brutes" but is nonetheless a largely ineffectual actor exemplifies this passive stance. It thus seems productive to attend more rigorously to turn-of-the-century novels' ways of figuring non-visual experience. None of this is to say, of course, that non-visual modalities remain unaffected by the impact of historical conditions. However, as Sedgwick points out with regard to touch, for instance, "The sense of physical touch itself, at least so far, has been remarkably unsusceptible to being amplified by technology" (15). She contrasts touch in this way with "the literally exponential enhancements of visual stimulus since Leeuwenhoek and Newton" (15). Theodor Adorno offers a similar take on hearing whereby "Hearing is the last not-yet-reified sense, not yet appropriated by the means-end rationality of bourgeois society" (Darius 89).

women, flower-crowned and brown-skinned,” all of whom are “blotted out by a grotesque and terrible nightmare brood” composed of, for example, “gin-bloated hags of the stew” (36). The entirety of the group is positioned alongside the ethereal vision of Ruth as a “spirit, a divinity, a goddess.”

This visual is soon complicated by subsequent passages in which sounds emitted by the women come to permeate Martin’s perceptions. Recounting Martin’s perception of Ruth’s voice, the narrator states, “As he listened to [Ruth’s voice], there rang in the ears of his memory the harsh cries of barbarian women and of hags, and, in lesser degrees of harshness, the strident voices of working women and of the girls of his own class. Then the chemistry of vision would begin to work, and they would troop in review across his mind, each, by contrast, multiplying Ruth’s glories” (56). Developing the contrast, the narrator describes his reception of the “divine” melody Ruth sings compared to “the weak pipings and shrill quaverings of factory girls, ill-nourished and untrained, and with the raucous shriekings from gin-cracked throats of the women of the seaport towns” (59). It is notable that the women’s suffering bodies are not depicted outright in the novel but rather through Martin’s ears, indicating the novels’ focus on the extent to which a sense of other bodies can inhabit a person. While no doubt shedding contempt on the women of Martin’s past (characteristic of Martin’s indisputably misogynist attitudes early in the novel), the language of these depictions more importantly denotes a physical enervation and suffering on the part of the laboring women that is expressed through the sounds Martin perceives. Unlike visual images which may separate and distance the viewing subject from object, sound more directly impresses upon the listener and immerses him or her in what is

heard.<sup>28</sup> In this way, Martin is shown to be drawn into or implicated in the women's situation to a far greater extent than he would be as a visual observer. The sound of the women's voices registers a pain nearly coincident with the painful sound that he perceives. Though certainly not providing him with an experience equivalent to the women's, this auditory immersion does nonetheless register a trace of that experience. On this note, Hamington points out that Merleau-Ponty's notion of a body receptive to other bodies does not amount to eliding the alterity of the other: "I perceive the other as a piece of behavior, for example, I perceive the grief or the anger of the other in his conduct, in his face or his hands, without recourse to any 'inner' experience of suffering or anger..The grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed"" (qtd. In Hamington 55). Explaining that this situation necessarily creates a gap between bodies' separate experience of the world that can never be completely bridged, he continues, "As part of the flesh of the world, however, I have an 'echo' or 'trace' of understanding. Ambiguity reigns once again. The alterity of the other is preserved, but not in a strictly solitary way" (55).

Resonating with London's depictions, Merleau-Ponty's specific sentiments on sound elaborate this idea of the echo of another body in one's own, explaining, "But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness in him as in myself the awesome birth of vociferation...There is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo" (144-145). London's interest of this quality of sound

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<sup>28</sup>Feminist theorists likewise point out how the distance and separation implied in visual modes of perception supports "ego-instrumentalist" models of selfhood in which, as Plumwood notes, "The other appears only as a hindrance to or as a resource for the self's own needs, and is defined entirely in relation to its ends" (145). Plumwood goes on to quote Frye's statement characterizing the work of the eye as that which sees "everything that is as a resource for man's exploitation. With this world-view, men see with arrogant eyes which organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests" (qtd. in Plumwood 145).



also surfaces in a passage detailing Martin's encounter with reading a text. Remarking on the corporeal effect of a story written by his friend Brissenden, Martin exclaims, "'It's wonderful!—wonderful! It has gone to my head. I am drunken with it. That great, infinitesimal question—I can't shake it out of my thoughts. That questing, eternal, ever recurring, thin little wailing voice of man is still ringing in my ears. It is like the dead-march of a gnat amid the trumpeting of elephants and the roaring of lions'" (256). This scene of reading notably draws on the auditory in gesturing toward the idea of corporeal continuity between reader and text that I proposed earlier.

Martin's reflections on tactility likewise bespeak his immersion in, rather than distance from, the situations of the women he recalls. In the following passage, Martin recollects his first handshake with Ruth: "She was a pale, slender spirit, exalted far beyond the flesh; but nevertheless the softness of her palm persisted in his thoughts. He was used to the harsh callouses of factory girls and working women. Well he knew why their hands were rough; but this hand of hers..It was soft because she had never used it to work with" (70). Here again, a sense of the women is expressed not directly, but through Martin's perceptual encounter with them. Prompted by his initial observations, he begins to envision the field of laboring women, evoking tactile memories of them. The narrator notes, "There was Gertrude. When her hands were not hard from the endless house-work, they were swollen and red like boiled beef what of the washing. And there was his sister Marian. She had worked in the cannery the preceding summer, and her slim, pretty hands were all scarred with the tomato-knives" (70). He likewise recalls "the hard palms of his mother as she lay in her coffin" (70). Perhaps even more so than the auditory modality, tactility implies a reversibility wherein one cannot touch another without being touched back and, again, receiving a trace of the other's experience. The text's figurations

of the tactile suggest that even recollecting or imagining touch can engender powerful effects or insights; interestingly, for instance, what Martin's recollections bring into focus is not only the factory work that has affected the women's hands but also the housework, a form of labor in the novel associated solely with women. Attention to the range of tactile qualities—hard, swollen—captures the sense in which the women are doubly impacted by the labor of the workplace and the home.

The tactile mode of engagement also allows the one who receives or imagines the touch of another to be reminded of his or her own body, allowing for further implication into the situation of another. This idea is particularly evident in the sensations evoked by Martin's memory of an exchange with Margey, a young factory worker. Apprehending how "her hand closed on his and pressed feverishly," Martin's flesh crawls, "as it had crawled that night when she clung to him" and he "felt her callouses grind and grate on his" while her "little cry rang in his ears" (71). Providing an antidote to his disturbing feeling is the image of Ruth he immediately conjures up: "and then a radiant glory shone on the wall, and up through the other vision, displacing it, glimmered Her pale face under its crown of golden hair, remote and inaccessible as a star" (71). While the language of crawling flesh surely denotes revulsion rather than communion, the possibility that Ruth becomes the prime target of revulsion for Martin and the novel as a whole invites rereading of these details of corporeal experience as more than simply reinforcing the denigration of working-class women. In particular, the body's sensing capacities are shown to open the self to the world and to other bodies, conveyed most fundamentally by the fact that Martin's sensing body serves as a means of representing the

women's somatic experiences.<sup>29</sup> On the whole, these passages mark a convergence of Martin's perceiving body with the women's bodies, approximating the corporeal continuity proposed by phenomenology that I sketched earlier. Non-visual modes serve to supplement the visual ways of relating to others, based on separation and distance, that could breed insensitivity to the situations of other bodies.<sup>30</sup>

In the novel, Martin's actions seem also to be shaped by his recollected encounters with women's bodies. This becomes especially discernable in the sensitivity towards the particular situation of women informing his actions throughout the novel's remainder. Upon becoming a successful writer, for example, he devotes his energy and financial resources almost exclusively to easing the strain of the women he knows. As intimated in the passage I cited earlier, he demonstrates particular awareness of women's work in the home. Early chapters emphasize, for example, how Martin's brother-in-law ruthlessly takes advantage of his wife's labor in both their family-run business and at home (epitomized in the observation that "She was patching a pair of his trousers, while his lean body was distributed over two chairs. . ." [62] as he read the newspaper). Albeit a modest gesture, Martin shows his recognition of the underappreciation of his sister's domestic labor by giving her money to hire a servant. Likewise, he devotes a considerable portion of his funds to helping his widowed friend Maria Silva provide for the bodily needs of her children, taking the children himself to purchase their food and clothes.

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<sup>29</sup>Phenomenology's focus on the body's openness to the world in this way seems notably distinct from Plumwood's account of the autonomous self as a "closed system" operating primarily in pursuit of its own ends and interests (145).

<sup>30</sup>The idea of supplementing and interrupting, as opposed to entirely displacing, the visual is another key point in phenomenology's focus on nonvisual capacities, especially in Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

Perhaps most significant, though, are Martin's efforts to pitch in and use his body to aid a flu-stricken Maria, doing for her the ironing she takes in as her source of income:

[Martin] found [Maria] in the kitchen one morning, groaning with pain, tears of weakness running down her cheeks, vainly endeavoring to put through a large ironing. He promptly diagnosed her affliction as La Grippe, dosed her with hot whisky, and ordered her to bed. But Maria was refractory. The ironing had to be done, she protested and delivered that night, or else there would be no food on the morrow for the seven small and hungry Silvas. To her astonishment (and it was something that she never ceased from relating to her dying day), she saw Martin Eden seize an iron from the stove and throw a fancy shift-waist on the ironing-board. (252)

These acts reveal his attunement to working women's disproportionate responsibility for other people's bodies, both in the working sphere and at home. Responding to the differential situation of women, he displays sensitivity to what lies outside his own experience as a male laborer. Once more, easy identification with others is obviated in these appeals to corporeal experience, but the possibilities of connection to others via the body are preserved.

Yet the course of action accompanying Martin's awareness of the women's situations cannot serve as a satisfactory resolution to the more systemic problem revealed by the text. Indeed, his dissatisfaction with such remedies seems to contribute to the melancholy tone marking the close of the novel and leading to his suicide. I will try to suggest in the section that follows how the novel points to more radical possibilities for action. Nonetheless, this dimension of the novel again calls attention to the significance of recognizing one's own embodiment and defining the self as a body powerfully connected to other bodies. Here, not

only does the failure to conceive of oneself as a body risk attributing mere flesh-thing status to others, as phenomenological accounts forecast. Beyond this insight, the novel suggests further that failing to apprehend oneself in corporeal, material terms allows the care of one's body to fall largely to others, whether to women or to the working classes. This sentiment is expressed both through the problematic of the working-women's situation that unfolds in the novel as well as in memorable scenes in which Martin takes a job at a hotel laundry requiring hard labor. Such scenes hark back to Herman Melville's short story "The Paradise of Bachelors and The Tartarus of Maids," which juxtaposes the lavish lives of Temple Bar lawyers with the experiences of female workers at a paper mill. Likewise, in London's novel, images of the hotel guests and the laborers are interspersed: "It was exhausting work, carried on, hour after hour, at top speed. Out on the broad verandas of the hotel, men and women, in cool white, sipped iced drinks and kept their circulation down. But in the laundry the air was sizzling. The huge stove roared red hot and white hot, while the irons, moving over the damp clothes, sent up clouds of steam" (125). The comparison in this description illuminates the hidden substratum of labor on which others' sensory and bodily privileges depend, recalling Marxist readings that posit literature's function in suggesting how working-class bodies are sacrificed for bourgeois bodies. Besides simply revealing relationships such as this, though, the novel's overall stress on recognizing others' bodily experience as connected to one's own in the way that earlier figurations of Martin and the women illustrate works to envision other bodies in part as important conditions of the self's field of action. This recognition might, in turn, serve to curb the tendency to shift disproportionate care of bodies to others.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Again, regarding the body as a point of connection to others in this way might mark resistance to a mode of operating in which the "self does not recognize the other as another self, another distinct center of agency, and

I pointed out earlier that corporeal continuity ought not to be confused with a damaging assimilation or colonization of the other.<sup>32</sup> London's portrayal of Ruth functions as a strong indictment against this approach to incorporating a sense of other bodies' experiences into one's own. Ironically, throughout much of *Martin Eden*, it is Ruth who is perhaps figured as having the strongest capacity for a corporeal openness to another body. *Martin Eden* repeatedly focuses on Ruth's sense of being permeated by Martin's bodily aura.<sup>33</sup> Metaphors employed in conveying the nature of his corporeal atmosphere notably evoke active qualities of bodily material. Paul Ricoeur's conception of metaphor as posing representations that both transport readers from and return them to the world (266), I think, is an especially apt way to think about how these images at least in part invite reflection on materiality. From the outset, Ruth is drawn to what she perceives as the active material of Martin's body. Perhaps the most explicit image of these active corporeal properties compares Martin's body to an active volcano: "[Ruth] wanted to lean toward this burning, blazing man that was like a volcano spouting forth strength, robustness, and health" (18). The narrator implies the nature of this desire to share in the activity of another body, remarking, "Her gaze rested for a moment on the muscular neck, heavy corded, almost bull-like, bronzed by the sun, spilling over with rugged health and strength. And though he sat there, blushing and humble, again she felt drawn to him. She was surprised by a wanton

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resistance, whose needs, goals and intrinsic value place ethical limits on the self and must be considered and respected" (Plumwood 145).

<sup>32</sup>Hamington notes, "Because I share a corporeal existence with other beings, we to some extent share sensory perceptions and understandings. This continuity is not a perfect colonization of others' experiences—or as Merleau-Ponty describes it, 'not yet incorporeal'—but an extrapolation that is much more than abstraction. It is an 'intercorporeal' understanding. The experience of the other becomes a 'generalized I' of unrealized potential in all my own experiences" (53).

<sup>33</sup>Characters who possess magnetic "atmospheres" that powerfully influence other characters of different gender and class status are also a recurring feature of Dreiser's novels as well. A character's "atmosphere" in these fictions seems to represent the merging of interior and exterior qualities that emanate from the body.

thought that rushed into her mind. It seemed to her that if she could lay her two hands upon that neck that all its strength and vigor would flow out to her...In truth, she was far from robust, and the need of her body and mind was for strength” (42). Returning to this sense of eruption, the narrator subsequently remarks, “...it was Martin’s intensity of power, the old excess of strength that seemed to pour from his body and on and over her” (107). This metaphor also notably highlights the influence of these emanations on Ruth, as she is struck like Leda by the Swan in W.B. Yeats’s poem: “He was soon spilling over with vitality and each day he saw Ruth, at the moment of meeting, she experienced the old shock of his strength and health” (142).<sup>34</sup>

The marked sense of sexuality, or what we might even describe as ecstasy, in these passages from the novel is also especially notable since sexuality, or sexual experience can provide opportunities for disrupting traditional boundaries of the self. Indeed, as Judith Butler has observed, “To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and this can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief” (*Undoing Gender* 20). Explaining further the ways in which the sexualized body is a quintessential instance of a body open to the influence of another body, Butler remarks:

We’re undone by each other...One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about *my* sexuality or *my* gender, as we do (and as we must) we mean something complicated by it.

Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as *modes*

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<sup>34</sup>“A sudden blow: the great wings beating still/Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed/By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,/He holds her helpless breast upon his breast” (1-4). Other related and potentially fruitful links might be made here to nineteenth-century notions of “vitalism” that may be further traced to Walt Whitman’s work. For a recent reading of Whitman and the body, see Sorisio (173-201).

*of being dispossessed*, ways of being for another, or indeed, by virtue of another.

(*Undoing Gender* 19)

Butler's account seems an especially appropriate description of Ruth in the passages above as well as in other scenes centering on Ruth as a reader. Particularly interesting to consider is how the text also becomes a "channel" for connecting bodies. As Martin reads his story to Ruth, the narrator notes that, "Her eyes were wide, color was in her pale cheeks, and before he finished it seemed to him that she was almost panting. Truly she was warmed; but she was warmed, not by the story, but by him. She did not think much of the story; it was Martin's intensity of power, the old excess of strength that seemed to pour from his body and on and over her. The paradox of it was that it was the story itself that was freighted with his power, that was the channel, for the time being, through which his strength poured out to her" (107). References to Ruth's physical changes here suggest a stirring up of the reader's bodily presence to participate in their encounters with their reading. Perhaps we might even say that London draws on the sexualized body here to strongly encourage readers to approach the text with an "open body."

The novel's deployment of volcanic images of the body intersect notably with contemporary poststructuralist theories that underscore the volatility and unfixability of bodies, an intersection I will discuss momentarily. I indicated in the introduction that this series of recurring images evoking active, dynamic qualities of the body in *Martin Eden* might also be productively read within the context of nineteenth-century ideas concerning matter and force represented by thinkers such as Herbert Spencer.<sup>35</sup> Although Spencer is commonly associated with a teleological view of life processes, having been criticized and perhaps even dismissed for

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<sup>35</sup>While the scope of this project does not permit me to thoroughly consider the relationship between Spencer's theories and the novel's representations of embodiment, such an examination might help to elucidate how to understand convergences of turn-of-the-century conceptual terrain with our own.



these perceived limitations, his interest in the actions and interactions of matter makes him a figure who can contribute to theories of corporeality: indeed, he may have anticipated some poststructuralist insights. Supporting my sense of the potential relevance of Spencer's work in this regard, Laura Doyle observes, "Increasingly after the eighteenth century, physiologists and biologists remarked on and studied the active properties of 'matter.' As Herbert Spencer later noted, scientists increasingly were coming to consider 'dead matter' as 'everywhere alive.'" (xxxix). Doyle further notes that these remarks and statements hint at the "volatile, unfixable powers of bodies of all kinds."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, in *First Principles* (a work referred to numerous times throughout *Martin Eden* and highly revered by London's protagonist) Spencer was especially interested in the interactions between matter and force, as he emphasized that, while force could change the structure of matter, matter could also exert influence on the forces with which it might come into contact (363).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Elaborating on the significance of the "radical, structural threat" posed by this shift in thought, Doyle comments: ". . . in this new account, both mind *and* matter are active. The old model of active spirit and passive matter articulated in both the Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian traditions has been decentered, its key principle weakened, violated. This is no insignificant event in the history of western thought. It throws askew the spirit/matter binary of traditional metaphysics, with its assumption of an active/passive relation between them. If matter has an energy of its own, what is its relation to the power of Spirit on which it had supposedly depended for actualization? Insofar as this dichotomy has underwritten political hierarchies since antiquity, to unsettle it is to create a fault line in the social geography" (*Bodies of Resistance* xxxii).

<sup>37</sup>Spencer notes, "Action and reaction begin equal and opposite, it follows that in differentiating the parts on which it falls in unlike ways, the incident force must itself be correspondingly differentiated. Instead of being as before a uniform force, it must thereafter be a multiform force—a group of dissimilar forces" (363). The effect of force here, then, is not uni-directional, but must necessarily register the effect of interaction. In light of the argument I have been making about the novel so far, it is also significant to note that it is Spencer's writing that, in fact, is said to attune Martin to the concept of "relationship," albeit a very broad sense of the term: "But Herbert Spencer had shown him not only that it was not ridiculous, but that it was impossible for there to be no connection. All things were related to all other things from the farthest star in the wastes of space to the myriads of atoms in the grain of sand under one's foot. This new concept was a perpetual amazement to Martin, and he found himself engaged continually in tracing the relationship between all things under the sun and on the other side of the sun" (150).

The rendering of Martin's body as a volcano serves as both a point of continuity with as well as a significant counterpoint to Foucault's notion of the docile body subject to power.<sup>38</sup> In line with Foucault, feminist theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz point out that bodies manifest a kind of organic incompleteness, a plasticity, that allows them to become subject to social and cultural influences (Grosz xi). At the same time, they point out that the very tendency towards openness allows for resistance to completed construction. Drawing on phenomenological accounts of embodiment, Laura Doyle likewise refers to the body as "the terminal locus of power that also defines the place for the redirection and reversal of power" ("Bodies Inside/Out" 79). She underscores that the same bodily opening on to the world that enables disciplining and normalizing processes to "mold" the active properties of bodily matter simultaneously provide conditions for resistance against those processes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Foucault's writings on the body as it is subject to disciplinary regimes has exerted particular influence on Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines*, a major study of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century U.S. literature and culture. In part an examination of the "discourse of [literary] naturalism" (4), *Bodies and Machines* shows the ways in which naturalist novels participate in the "'naturalization' of the disciplines of machine culture," at the turn of the century or the processes by which machines came to be so readily assimilated to the body at the turn of the century. What Seltzer describes is less an outright replacement of human bodies with machines than what he calls an "intimate coupling" of them (13). In Seltzer's reading of texts by writers such as Jack London and Frank Norris, this easy intimacy between (mainly male) bodies and machines takes hold in part due to a masculine impulse to transcend the natural body and its association with the feminine. Seltzer proposes that, as a result, the body's interactions with the machine in literature of this period denotes a recovery of a masculine dominance supposedly threatened by conditions at the turn of the century, or what Seltzer describes as a projection of "the autonomous male technology of generation" (31). Rather than operating from a fear or rejection of feminine "nature" that expedites their compliance with the disciplinary regimes of machine culture, as Seltzer posits,<sup>38</sup> turn-of-the-century authors instead, I argue, acknowledge and attend to particular properties and capacities of human bodies. Fleissner has likewise questioned Seltzer's move to "[cast] male naturalist writers as obsessive technocrats out to manage and appropriate a threatening female 'nature,'" further pointing out that "This reading is not wrong so much as it is limited by its assumption that the 1890s represent merely the culmination of a century-long masculine attempt to control the woman's body" (*Women, Compulsion, and Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism* 8).

<sup>39</sup>Doyle highlights a view shared by Merleau-Ponty and more recent critics as she notes that "he does not argue that an act of freedom or resistance must transcend history and the structured style of the subject; rather he insists that this structure and the 'motivations' invested in it are the instruments of freedom" (*Bodies of Resistance* xix). Doyle points out that contemporary cultural theorists might be inclined to argue that motivated "styles" in fact take the form of disciplines in Foucault's sense and thereby restrict 'access' to the world. Yet she goes on to emphasize the possibilities of disrupting these processes given Merleau-Ponty's view of the "incessantly appearing temporality in which we live as medium of incompleteness and potentials." For additional discussion of possibilities

Here again, it may be helpful to connect these theories to the conceptual terrain of turn-of-century theories regarding the relationship between bodies and action. In his writings on habit, William James suggests the role of bodily plasticity or organic openness in the grounding of action. While James has often been credited with emphasizing the active nature of the human mind, his theories of human action attach considerable significance to the mediating body. Habit as a form of action, moreover, is no small matter for James who describes habit as “the enormous fly-wheel of society” (121). Echoing Foucault, James additionally remarks, “[Habit] alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance” (121). Habitual action for James becomes the most prominent site of mind and body inter-connection. In determining the conditions required for the development of habit, James returns to fundamental properties of matter in order to demonstrate that the body, as a compound substance, is essentially plastic and thus open to transformation in its habits. James explains that because bodies are compound structures of matter (as opposed to elementary particles of matter) they are subject to the influence of outside forces or inner tension to the extent that they can be turned into something different than what they had previously been. James thus arrives at the conclusion that “the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic materials of which their bodies are composed” (105). Notably, James links habit to the body and also to ethics, or to “the *ethical implications of the law of habit*” (120, James’s emphasis). He elaborates, “The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be

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for extending Foucauldian lines of thought, see David Couzens Hoy’s “Critical Resistance: Foucault and Bourdieu” in *Perspectives on Embodiment: the Intersections of Nature and Culture*, eds. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber.

undone” (127). Although he employs a questionable moralizing language of right and wrong, I think his connections among habit, the body, and ethics are nonetheless significant.<sup>40</sup>

In light of these observations regarding the body’s plasticity, it proves worthwhile to attend to the shift in register from the novel’s language of active volcanoes to that of sculpted clay in the figuring of bodies. While at first seeming to appreciate Martin’s difference from her and dwelling in the possibility that his presence might affect her views or actions in unforeseen ways, Ruth eventually manipulates this point of connection to Martin through her designs to reform him. Conceiving of him as “clay” that she aims to mold, Ruth demonstrates a questionable ethics in, to borrow Judith Butler’s words, attempting to assimilate alterity to the preexisting subject, incorporating the Other as the same. Like the images of eruptions, London develops this clay motif throughout the narrative: “[Martin] was untamed, wild, and in secret ways her vanity was touched by the fact that he came so mildly to her hand. Likewise she was stirred by the common impulse to tame the wild thing. It was an unconscious impulse, and farthest from her thoughts that her desire was to re-thumb the clay of him into a likeness of her father’s image, which image she believed to be the finest in the world” (58). In repeatedly reminding Martin of the story of Mr. Butler who rose from humble beginnings to become a lawyer, Ruth seems intent on witnessing his economic ascendance and corresponding

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<sup>40</sup>Within this discussion of “the ethical implication of habit,” James also expounds on the relationship between patronizing the arts and action: “All Goods are disguised by the vulgarity of their concomitants, in this work-a-day world; but woe to him who can only recognize them when he thinks them in their pure and abstract form! The habit of excessive novel-reading and theatre-going will produce true monsters in this line. The weeping of a Russian lady over the fictitious personages in the play, while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside, is the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale. Even the habit of excessive indulgence in music, for those who are neither performers themselves nor musically gifted enough to take it in a purely intellectual way, has probably a relaxing effect upon the character. One becomes filled with emotions which habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up” (126). James goes on to advise a binding of emotion to action, recommending, “The remedy would be, never to suffer one’s self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in *some* active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world—speaking genially to one’s aunt, or giving up one’s seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers—but let it not fail to take place” (126).

transcendence of his working-class body. Her desire for Martin's bodily transcendence is underlined elsewhere by her classically Cartesian sense of body as a prison<sup>41</sup> as she watches his face: "It was a transfigured face with great shining eyes that gazed beyond the veil of sound and saw behind it the leap and pulse of life and the gigantic phantoms of the spirit. She was startled. The raw, stumbling lout was gone. The ill-fitting clothes, battered hands, and sunburned face remained; but these seemed the prison-bars through which she saw a great soul looking forth. . ." (56).

Ruth's attempts to assimilate and mold Martin into a completed construction ultimately fail and, significantly, the image of clay's plasticity is invoked to account for Martin's resistance to her aims: "[Ruth's] disappointment lay in that this man she had taken to mould, refused to be moulded. To a certain extent she had found his clay plastic, then it had developed stubbornness, declining to be shaped in the image of her father or of Mr. Butler" (169). Elucidating the stubbornness of Martin's "clay," the narrator concludes, "What was great and strong in him, she missed, or worse yet, misunderstood. This man, whose clay was so plastic that he could live in any number of pigeonholes of human existence, she thought willful and most obstinate because she could not shape him to live in her pigeonhole, which was the only one she knew" (169).<sup>42</sup> In response to Ruth's efforts to repress his conspicuous embodiment for the sake of achieving her own ends, Martin deploys his body as a presence in and limit upon her field of action. Clay as an artistic medium is also important to consider here because, like the references to authorship and

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<sup>41</sup>Susan Hekman notes, "Descartes defines the attitude toward the body that characterizes much subsequent modern philosophy: body and mind are mutually exclusive and the body is the 'prison' that the mind must escape to achieve knowledge" (62).

<sup>42</sup>The novel registers a similar consciousness of the "pliability" of bodies through Martin's observation to Ruth concerning the body of a working-class woman. He notes, "'She has worked long hours for years at machines. When one's body is young, it is very pliable, and hard work will mold it like putty according to the nature of the work.'" (145).

readership throughout the novel, the aesthetic metaphor signals a self-reflexivity for readers of London's novel. Insofar as Ruth aspires to become the "creator" of Martin by molding his clay into a single, congealed shape, her art project fails. London's deployment of clay may indicate that the more successful artistic renderings of persons might be those demonstrating and preserving a bodily plasticity or openness to change.

Significantly, Ruth's approach to the other also makes her a poor "reader" of other bodies. The narrator notes:

Ruth never read hunger in Martin's face, which had grown lean and had enlarged the slight hollows in the cheeks. In fact, she marked the change in his face with satisfaction. It seemed to refine him, to remove from him much of the dross of flesh and the too animal-like vigor that lured her while she detested it.

Sometimes, when with her, she noted an unusual brightness in his eyes, and she admired it, for it made him appear more the poet and the scholar—the things he would have liked to be and which she would have liked him to be. (174)

Allowing her sense of the things "she would have liked him to be" direct her reading of his body, Ruth remains acutely out of touch with Martin's situation and his suffering. London's rendering of Ruth indicates that attunement to others' corporeality is therefore not necessarily an end-in-itself, but that it must be matched by the relinquishment of one's own self-interested inclinations.

Having achieved success as a writer in both commercial and literary elite realms by the end of *Martin Eden*, Martin feels a deep frustration with his readers. Responding to their incessant interest in taking him to dinner, he finds it impossible to evade the corporeal memory of his previously suffering, starving body: "And always was Martin's maddening and unuttered demand: Why didn't you feed me then?" (321). Throughout closing scenes of the novel, this

corporeal memory takes the form of an embodied ghost of his working-class body who surfaces repeatedly during his speaking engagements:

And often, at such times, he would abruptly see slouch in among the company a young hoodlum in square-cut coat and under a stiff rim Stetson hat...Five hundred fashionably gowned women turned their heads, so intent and steadfast was Martin's gaze to see what he was seeing. But they saw only the empty center aisle. He saw the young tough lurching down that aisle and wondered if he would remove the stiff-rim which never yet had he seen him without. Straight down the aisle he came, and up the platform. (321-22)

Rather than serving as a mere disturbing reminder of his dislocation, the ghost body functions as medium for appreciating the suffering of those in his former class location. Like the myriad of other moments in the novel focused on the body, the ghost intrusions constitute a potentially disruptive force.

That the body is figured as so central and enduring a component of Martin's character suggests several implications for conceiving the body as a basis for personhood. The body's incorporation into the self would seem to encourage a sense of other bodies to be incorporated into the self as well, given that the novel continuously attaches a sense of other bodies to the bodies in *Martin Eden* as I have tried to show here. As the novel seems to work through, this sense of other bodies must remain an approximation and avoid the collapse of difference or assimilation of alterity. With its emphasis on bodily plasticity and openness to the surrounding world, the novel opens up the possibility that bodies might, in particular, be "re-formed" to incorporate serious and sensitive regard for other bodies.

Martin's frustration in the end perhaps lies both with his readers' failure to demonstrate a regard for other suffering bodies and his own frustration with himself for failing to inspire this sense through his writing. His final act of suicide at the end of the novel is strongly connected to these disappointments. I would argue that Martin's suicide could be read as a dramatization of his frustration with readers and his own writing rather than as the consequence of a discomfiting feeling that he belongs nowhere as other critics of the novel have suggested, or as the crippling loss of autonomous agency as critics of naturalism propose. Many of Martin's own readers clearly have failed him in demonstrating a full sense of corporeal continuity or serious regard for other bodies. But perhaps it is London's readers—readers who have been continually encouraged to pause over the many moments of somatic attentiveness throughout *Martin Eden*—who may be able to recognize this very failure as tragic.



## 2.0 INTERSPECIES EXCHANGE IN JACK LONDON'S *WHITE FANG*

There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human. (Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*)

Jack London's animal-centered fictions emerge during a moment when many writers were actively engaged in working out questions regarding the place of the non-human within human spheres of concern.<sup>43</sup> The publication of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) marks an era in which the prevention of cruelty to domestic, or companion animals, in particular, became a "national obsession."<sup>44</sup> Questions of human-animal relationships registered within the literature of this period intersect with questions of animality that have increasingly received attention from theorists in our own time. The work of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard, for instance, has suggested the importance of animals' role in interrogating "the figure of the human as the constitutive (rather than technically, materially, and discursively constituted) stuff of history and

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<sup>43</sup>Indeed as Philip Armstrong points out, despite their unequivocal "co-implication," natural and cultural domains come to be viewed as increasingly dichotomous during the nineteenth century. Drawing on Bruno Latour's work, Armstrong characterizes the detachment of wild nature from culture as a historical separation required to sustain "the most authoritative epistemologies of modernity" such as liberal democracy, capitalism and scientific empiricism (1040).

<sup>44</sup>See Jennifer Mason's *Civilized Creatures: Urban Animals, Sentimental Culture, and American Literature, 1850-1900*.

the social” (Wolfe xi).<sup>45</sup> Likewise, contemporary theories of animality raise significant questions concerning the nature of human-animal community, including questions about the nature of humans’ responsibilities for protecting not only animals themselves, but also for preserving and enhancing the environment we share with animals.<sup>46</sup>

This chapter examines the ways in which London’s animal-centered fictions explore embodiment or corporeality (rather than mentality or the non-corporeal) as a condition shared by humans and animals. Specifically, London takes up the wolf or wild dog figure in *White Fang* (1906) as a way to think through a different kind of being, relating, and acting in the world—as a way to imagine a different orientation toward the world. London’s fictional accounts of animality can be read as attempts to explore an orientation towards one’s surroundings that proceeds from an expanded understanding of corporeality.<sup>47</sup> The animal body in London’s work becomes a figure for imagining a stance as well as a mode of knowing and acting in a more responsive relation to one’s surroundings or environment: I argue that London employs the canine figure in order to suggest that an animal style, or mode of relating to the world may be particularly instructive and valuable to humans.

Frequently characterized as the narrative of a dog’s civilization, *White Fang* relates the story of wolves in the Northland Wild and their interactions with humans occupying that region.

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<sup>45</sup>Wolfe elaborates, noting that the animal reveals “our traditional pictures of the ontological fullness of the human to have been fantasies all along, built on the sand of disavowal of our own contingency, our own materiality, our own ‘spoken-ness’” (19).

<sup>46</sup>Particularly relevant to this study, many of these intellectual engagements with animality respond expressly or implicitly to Descartes’s famous conception of animal as mere machine, capable only of “reaction” and not “response.” See, for instance, Derrida’s “And Say the Animal Responded?”

<sup>47</sup>In a related vein, Donald Pease has argued in “Psychoanalyzing the Narratives of Naturalism: *The Call of the Wild*” that the dogs’ libidinal bodies in London’s *The Call of the Wild* allow them to evade disciplinary technologies supporting the normative order. For Pease, the dogs expose the violence that must be repressed in a disciplinary society. While I find this reading insightful, I focus on the more potentially constructive aspects of the canine body imagined as an alternative to normative regimes.

The narrative follows the title character, White Fang, through his early explorations of his wilderness surroundings, his upbringing in an Indian camp, and his forced submission to humans most notably Beauty Smith, who trains him to be a fighting dog. Ultimately, White Fang meets Weedon Scott, the man who rescues him from his abusers and takes him to live with Scott's family. *White Fang* has received considerably less critical attention than its counterpart *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and, in fact, many critics passingly refer to it simply as the reverse narrative of London's 1903 novel. For my purposes, it is useful to distinguish between the two texts given that the canine phenomenology central to my discussion here would seem to operate differently in *White Fang* which features a wolf-dog who is only later "civilized," as opposed to a "civilized" dog who is released into the wild, as is the case with Buck in *The Call of the Wild*. At the same time, it is important to address the critical status of *The Call of Wild* when reading *White Fang*. My approach to London's work departs from readings that have persisted in emphasizing the influence of evolutionary theory and Social Darwinist overtones in London's animal-centered fictions. These readings include not only criticism drawing on purely bleak versions of Darwinist thought that can be found within the body of traditionally "naturalist" criticism, but also interpretations that have tried to salvage the role of evolutionary concepts in London's work.<sup>48</sup> Such readings typically interpret fictional animals as representing a Darwinian-inspired survival-of-the-fittest-ethos. As I plan to show, however, London's work presents corporeality as a shared condition of animals and humans and a grounding for important epistemological and ethical perceptions. This recognition, in turn, points to a widening of

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<sup>48</sup>See, for instance, Lisa Hopkins's "Jack London's Evolutionary Hierarchies: Dogs, Wolves, and Men" in *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880-1940: Essays on Ideological Conflict and Complicity*. I find that this focus, and particularly the complete conflation of animal and human life that critics seem to assume, obscures the dimensions of London's work that I am trying to illuminate.

humans' scope of concern and sense of responsibility for human and nonhuman alike, rather than the self-protective narrowing of concern or responsibility implied by Social Darwinist philosophies.

Clarifying London's work in relation to Social Darwinism, moreover, takes on added significance given that the belief in Anglo-Saxon dominance implied in that view has sometimes been linked to imperialist strands in London's works. Critics have noted ambivalent attitudes toward imperialism in London's work and one can undoubtedly find some rather overt and troubling assertions of Anglo-Saxon superiority within his writings. The perception of London as a fervent supporter of imperialism aims has likely contributed to readings of his animal-centered fictions as allegories that serve to affirm imperialist aims.<sup>49</sup> As I hope to show, however, close examination of London's animal fiction reveals an interest in an epistemological stance that undermines epistemologies linked to colonization emphasizing the absolute difference and distance of the Other.<sup>50</sup> Rather than allegories of Social Darwinism that straightforwardly work to support imperialist interests, I find that London's animal fictions explore an epistemological stance that ultimately works against the dominating relations that characterize imperialist epistemologies and practices.

In contrast to Social Darwinist interpretive frameworks, then, I propose instead that a notion of interspecies exchange between animals and humans—with the body as a key site for

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<sup>49</sup>See, for example, Jopi Nyman's *Postcolonial Animal Tale from Kipling to Coetzee*, (56-76) which interprets *White Fang* as an imperialist rejection of hybridity. Most readings do not find London's work as uniformly supportive of imperialist aims as Nyman finds; as I mentioned, most critics do acknowledge conflicting views in this regard.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Peluso's "Gazing at Royalty: Jack London's 'The People of the Abyss' and the Emergence of American Imperialism" employs this slightly more nuanced approach to thinking about imperialism in London's work. Peluso argues that London invokes such a colonizing epistemology in his book *The People of the Abyss* to support a specifically American imperialism.

these exchanges—more strongly captures the work of London’s fiction.<sup>51</sup> Suggesting that animal modes of orientation may serve to reorient human actions, London’s fictionalizations of animality may help us to conceive of animals in turn-of-the century literature as something other than indices of ethical regression.<sup>52</sup> To figure animals in ways that stand to contribute to discussions of ethics is certainly not unique to London’s literary work in the early twentieth century. Christine Kenyon-Jones and others have pointed out how English Romantic-era poets such as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley draw on the tradition of “theriophily,” or philosophical writings originating from the classical period that posit animals’ moral superiority to humankind.<sup>53</sup> As Kenyon-Jones shows, this philosophical stance gathers particular momentum in the early eighteenth century with writers such as Alexander Pope, Viscount Bolingbroke, and Julien-Offray de la Mettrie who issue rejections of Descartes’ famous figuration of the animal as an automaton or machine lacking soul, rationality and feelings (19).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Here I am drawing on Ralph Acampora’s notion of an interspecies ethic or ethos that is the subject of his work *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body* (2006). Acampora seeks also to think through the potential and possibilities of conceiving embodiment—or bodiment, as he prefers—as a shared condition of animals and human-animals. Influenced by the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, he aims to explore “the issue of cross-species exchange of somatic sensibilities related to material bodies” (18). Within the context of aesthetics, Steve Baker’s essay “Sloughing the Human” similarly points out how the possibilities of exchange across human-animal boundaries have been a source of interest for artists. Baker’s *The Postmodern Animal* which further explores artists’ treatment of these exchanges, notably suggests that the bodily freedom and unboundedness associated with animals render them important figures for artists and writers (18).

<sup>52</sup>In terms of Jack London scholarship, my project may also help to elucidate what some critics have described as London’s contradictory and complex engagement with philosophy and ethics. Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne Campbell Reesman note this feature of London’s work in their introduction to a recent collection of essays entitled *Rereading Jack London*.

<sup>53</sup>For a study exclusively of Shelley’s work on this theme, see Timothy Morton’s *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*. Morton’s approach to Shelley’s writings on the natural world and vegetarianism employs a “green cultural critical” understanding of the body as an “interface between society and the natural environment” (2, 9) akin to my own understanding of the body’s treatment in works of the authors I examine in the present study.

<sup>54</sup>de la Mettrie’s response to Descartes is particularly noteworthy for its corporeal linkages between humans and animals as he speculates that “if animals were machines, so too were humans, since the soul could be seen as a function of the body in humans as well as in animals” (qtd. In Kenyon-Jones 22).

Delineations of anatomical similarities between the bodies of humans and animals in the biological taxonomies of Comte de Buffon and Carolus Linnaeus as well as the fact of urbanization (which may have stirred greater respect for animals in city inhabitants who were not in daily contact with animals) were further developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, likely contributing to the participation of the period's literary figures in this "skeptical tradition of human debasement" (Kenyon-Jones 16).<sup>55</sup> Theriophily's influence on satire makes it possible to see Mark Twain as one prominent late nineteenth-century American heir to this tradition who also registers the effects of evolutionary theory in reinforcing such views. Declaring his intention to renounce his "allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals; since it now seems plain to me that the theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one...the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals," (*Letters from the Earth* 177) Twain expresses an urge to evaluate human behavior in relation to the presumed superiority of animal being.<sup>56</sup>

As these accounts show, vehement rejection of Cartesian philosophy combined with revelations of the physical likenesses between humans and animals undercut notions of human superiority which contributed to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions of theriophilic-influenced literature. Ironically, however, corporeality does not seem to be highlighted as a ground for human-animal translations out of which new ethical possibilities potentially benefiting both humans and animals might arise. In these literary treatments, human-animals are

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<sup>55</sup>Kenyon-Jones's *Kindred Brutes* and other accounts of attitudes towards animals in this period draw on Keith Thomas's landmark study *Man and the Natural World* which surveys the major shift from largely negative attitudes towards animals prevalent in early modern England to more reverent views of animals operating in the eighteenth century.

<sup>56</sup>For a discussion of similar attitudes elevating animals over humans throughout Twain's literary corpus see Mary Allen's *Animals in American Literature*.

perhaps too cynically or hastily dismissed as irrevocably limited and ineffectual, signified by Byron's man as "degraded mass of animated dust" in "Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog" (1808). Such an oversight points to another pernicious effect of associating humans too closely with the non-corporeal. As I plan to show, London's suggestion of the animal as something other than an ethical regression via an emphasis on the body represents a different way of engaging a long literary tradition that has asserted the ethical values of animals—a way of engaging a long literary tradition that has drawn on the animal figure to critique human failing.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to considering some contexts more familiar to the analysis of animal-centered fictions as I do momentarily, some discussion of treatments of animals within popular literature and culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the U.S. helps to further illuminate the significance of London's concentration on animal embodiment in *White Fang*. Both Jennifer Mason's recent study, *Civilized Creatures: Urban Animals, Sentimental Culture, and American Literature, 1850-1900*,<sup>58</sup> and my own work on fiction published in periodicals in the 1890s suggest that domestic animals received new ethical attention during the second half of

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<sup>57</sup>While eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers' exploration of the ethical possibilities of human-animal corporeal continuity is not something emphasized in Kenyon-Jones's study, her study includes some striking examples relevant to this idea. She points out, for instance, that Byron's own "deformed" body provides a basis for connection to the non-normative bodies of animals (37). She also cites a poem by John Wilmot Rochester that invokes animal corporeality and critique of human rationality: "Were I not (who to my cost already am/One of those strange prodigious Creatures, Man)/A Sprit free, to choose for my own share,/What Case of Flesh and Blood I pleas'd to weare,/I'd be a Dog, a Monkey, or a Bear,/Or anything but that vain Animal /Who is so proud of being rational."

<sup>58</sup>Arguing more generally for the centrality of domestic animals to late nineteenth-century American life and its cultural forms, Mason's work builds on critical efforts to challenge the familiar claim characterizing the American literary imagination as preoccupied with a celebration of masculinized wilderness and concomitant scorn for feminized domesticity. With regard to animals, specifically, she cites her departure from the view positing that wild animals have proved more appealing figures for Americans as embodiments of individualism and self-reliance while domestic animals were despised from an American perspective in that they represented "enervation, subordination and dependence" (4).

the nineteenth century in part due to people's growing perceptions of these animals' intellectual and moral capacities. Contesting the primacy of wild nature within American literature and culture—the frontier and wilderness so often celebrated—Mason argues for the increasing attention to domestic animals rather than to wild creatures in the century's latter half. Following Nancy Armstrong, Mason links the popularity of companion animals with the rise of a market-oriented economy and the corresponding development of a middle-class identity based on interior qualities of mind.<sup>59</sup> She proposes in this way that pet keeping provided opportunities for demonstrating good moral character.<sup>60</sup> Noting that by the late nineteenth century, books and articles in reputable periodicals frequently directed readers to the workings of their companion animals' "inner lives," Mason explains, "In this context, it grew increasingly easy for people to believe that the animals they encountered through [pet-keeping and animal training] possessed or had the capacity to develop some of the intellectual, emotional, and moral qualities previously held to be exclusively human" (19).<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the suggestive non-fiction titles that Mason cites from periodicals such as *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* and *North American Review*, including "Have Animals Souls?" and "Are the Lower Animals Approaching Man?," fiction published throughout the last decade of the

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<sup>59</sup>The connection between middle-class identity and domestic animals is also highlighted in the suspicion of anti-cruelty to animal movements as essentially bourgeois movements functioning in part to strengthen the authority of this group. More generally along this line, Marion Scholtmeijer asks, "What if gentleness to nonhuman creatures is the ultimate expression of humankind's pretensions to moral dominance over nature?" (85).

<sup>60</sup>Though this connection provides a rationale for the intensified focus on domestic animals in the nineteenth century, Mason also cites a long history of Western science, dating from Aristotle, positioning domesticated animals between human and wild animals and notes a general belief in domesticated animals' superiority to wild animals that shaped natural history writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (10).

<sup>61</sup>As Mason points out, scientific efforts to designate the dog as a species separate from the wolf provides an especially salient example of how the presumed presence of inner lives worked to produce animal hierarchies; she cites nineteenth-century zoologist Edward Bennet's explanation that "It is to the moral and intellectual qualities of the dog that we must look for those remarkable peculiarities which distinguish him" (10).



nineteenth century in the mass-circulation magazine *The Cosmopolitan*<sup>62</sup> routinely sought to imagine animal interiority. Short stories from *The Cosmopolitan* provide some especially vivid illustrations of efforts to affirm and celebrate the mental qualities that domestic animals and humans were presumed to share. “A Dog’s Story” (1897) relates the tale of a heroic dog who saves his master both from being cheated at cards by a deceitful dealer and from being cheated on by his wife and his supposed friend, Lackwill. Highly anthropomorphic in that the canine protagonist narrates the story (though not fantastical, in the sense that the dog doesn’t actually speak to “human animals”), the story ironically makes clear the dog’s mental and linguistic sophistication as he repeatedly reminds readers that he is “only a dog,” while proceeding to use words like “sycophantic.” An even more notable aspect of this characterization of the dog, however, is not simply that he *has* intelligent thoughts, but that he can *see* and *read* the thoughts of humans. In fact, this capability is what makes him a great aid to the humans in the story since he manages to save his master by reading the thoughts of both the fraudulent dealer and the would-be adulterer and disrupting each of their intentions. Describing the dealer’s thoughts, he explains, “They were not black and horrible like murder thoughts, not reddish-purple like Lackwill’s thoughts..but they were treacherous—a dirty, muddy green, very different from the bright-green thoughts of an honest, hopeful man” (551). Similarly highlighting this visibility of human thoughts is his rendering of Lackwill’s advances toward his mistress which incite him to attack his master’s friend: “I saw his vile thoughts pouring out of him and fouling the air with their reddish-purple tinge” (552). Notably, the human characters in the story are blind to the superior mental capacities the dog possesses; his master punishes him for hurting the dealer and

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<sup>62</sup>The incongruity of these stories in *The Cosmopolitan*, as Mahady has noted (127), is somewhat striking given the monthly’s reputation for keeping its readers informed of “vital” concerns of the day such as international politics, education, and, advances in science and technology.

then finally throws him out for attacking his friend. But presumably the *reader* recognizes the mental ability that makes the dog so valuable to human life and is led to perceive the dog's treatment as an injustice.

The trope of reading and seeing thoughts also proves central to the story "Another Dog," published in *The Cosmopolitan* in 1895. In this instance, though, the plot revolves around a man who purports to read the thoughts and speech of two dogs, a St. Bernard and a Danish hound, he observes while at an inn. In this simple narrative, the observer watches the St. Bernard's efforts to keep the Danish hound out of areas that are off-limits to him. Figured throughout as highly rational, the St. Bernard accomplishes his task by carefully "explaining" to the Dane the myriad of reasons why he is not permitted to roam freely through the inn. Here again, this story not only stresses the dog's inner life, but also emphasizes the sense of kinship between dogs and humans through shared mentality. Referring variously to each dog throughout the story, the man states, "I saw the instant the idea entered his mind" and "none of these things entered his thoughts" (88-89). As in the other canine-themed story, the dog's calculated efforts to preserve order make him an important asset to human life.

Perhaps even more notable and disturbing than these dog tales, though, are several stories from *The Cosmopolitan* in which non-companion animals function to reveal the defective or "warped" mentality of members of racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>63</sup> Although written by different authors, these stories curiously present nearly identical narrative situations. In each story a "visitor" briefly winds up in a remote "backward" location on the outskirts of civilization and

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<sup>63</sup>"How the Buzzards Worked a 'Spell'" by E.W. Kemble (1901), "Danny Nowlan's Experiment in Goats" by Gerald Brenan (1897), and "The Den of the Grey Wolf" by Charles G.D. Roberts (1897).

witnesses a notable encounter between animals and one of the area's inhabitants.<sup>64</sup> For instance, in one such story, the narrator embarks with some friends on a fishing trip off the lower coast of Florida where they encounter (quote) "an old darky by the name of Silas," who is subsequently described as "utterly devoid of morals" (664). Unsuccessful at fishing, the narrator and his cohorts proceed to try and "catch" buzzards that had been flying over the bay and when they finally succeed, they tie a white tie around the buzzard's neck and release him. Later that day, Silas comes across the adorned buzzard and becomes very disturbed, thinking that it possesses the spirit of a deceased woman who wore a bonnet resembling the buzzard's tie. The other men witness the incident and the narrator recounts how they "led him from the spot on through the hummock, out into the clearing, and thrust him trembling, yet thankful, inside his cabin door" (666). Similarly, in another story, an Irish goatherd's conviction that goats possess the transmigrated souls of humans marks his thoughts as "warped and weird" in the narrator's view. The non-companion animals in these stories not only exhibit no signs of interiority, but also the belief that they might is characterized as part and parcel of an irrational or pathological mentality of non-Anglo Saxon populations. Deficient intellectual capacity might then be construed as justification for both groups' (animals and non-whites) continued exclusion from human "civilization's" concerns.

In keeping with Mason's findings, these fictions in *The Cosmopolitan* suggest that the attribution of mental, or "inner" qualities to domesticated companion animals helped to shape and secure their privileged position within realms of human attention or concern. Domestic

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<sup>64</sup>As Mahady has suggested, these settings help to reinforce a sense of non-white populations poor preparation for what Richard Ohman has termed the "Professional Managerial Class's project of modernity" (129). Also noteworthy in these stories is the use of dialect—specifically, the unmarked speech of the visitor-narrator alongside the heavy dialect of non-Anglo characters—which Ohmann describes as a class-distancing device. These features also resonate with Richard Brodhead's account of American regionalist writing as a ground for working out U.S. cultural anxieties concerning immigrants at the turn of the century in *Cultures of Letters*, a point further elaborated in Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions*.

animals are given a status closer to human not only than that of wild animals, but also than that of non-white populations. Indeed, as Mason observes, common practices of this period became geared less towards exposure to wilderness and untamed nature<sup>65</sup> than caring for animals who demonstrated the capacity to participate in civilization within the “built environment,” a tendency most strongly evident in the rise of movements to prevent cruelty to animals that, as I mentioned earlier, became a national obsession in late nineteenth-century America.

As a wolf who eventually becomes a “civilized” dog, the canine protagonist in *White Fang* defies easy assignment to either domestic or wild categories, making his status for both human characters and readers something of a question. While London no doubt grants a degree of interiority to his canine characters, he places marked emphasis on the wolves’ corporeality in the novel, bringing readers into imaginative contact with canine somatic experience of the world. In accordance with this attention, the text explicitly suspends modes of thought akin to “man,” managing at the same time to avoid inscription of human-animal hierarchy.<sup>66</sup> Thus the narrator notes, “In fact, the gray cub was not given to thinking—at least, to the kind of thinking customary of men. His brain worked in dim ways. Yet his conclusions were as sharp and distinct as those achieved by men” (154). Subsequent passages mark both his thinking by both a special openness to the unknown and a notable integration of the bodily. Once again working to differentiate human and animal cognition, the narrator notes: “Had the cub thought in man-fashion, he might have epitomized life as a voracious appetite, and the world as a place wherein

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<sup>65</sup>Important to consider, of course, is the economic and political interests in resisting a similar “humanization” of non-domestic animals that might threaten their use to U.S. society in the form of consumable products. Consider, for instance, this telling statement from an article in *Popular Science* entitled, “The Economic Value of Animals” (1897): “the so-called lower animals have been important factors in producing the high civilization which marks the Caucasian race of today” (827).

<sup>66</sup>For a discussion of related narrational ambiguities in *The Call of the Wild* see Jonathan Auerbach’s *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (89-90).

ranged a multitude of appetites, pursuing and being pursued, hunting and being hunted..." (171). The narrator continues, "But the cub did not think in man-fashion. He did not look at things with wide vision. He was single-purposed and entertained but one thought or desire at a time...The stir of the life that was in him, the play of his muscles, was an unending happiness. To run down meat was to experience thrills and elations. His rages and battles were pleasures. Terror itself, and the mystery of the unknown, lent to his living" (171).

Scenes related to bodily experience can be brought into new significance if we relinquish a Cartesian stance that automatically privileges mind or interiority. My purpose in discussing this aspect of the text, then, is not to suggest that depictions of interiority are not meaningful, but to propose that they need not take precedence in our interpretations. To better appreciate how London's depictions of animality themselves further encourage this reading, it is useful to briefly consider them in relation to other highly anthropomorphized treatments of animals in literature emerging prior to and around this time. Studies of children's literature are especially instructive in this regard. As Tess Cosslett points out, a particularly strong interest in the talking animal story emerges from the time of the inception of a separate children's literature in the eighteenth century, as this older genre is put to new and more pointed uses (9). Notably, throughout the history of the genre, the talking animal story is consistently linked to the treatment of "real" animals. Even the fable, a seemingly quintessential allegorical form, becomes tied to practices related to animals. Wildly popular in eighteenth-century England, the fable becomes a preferred form in educational circles due in part to John Locke's recommendation that they be used to deter children from engaging in acts of animal cruelty in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

(1693).<sup>67</sup> In this way, Locke “uses what becomes a standard eighteenth-century argument against cruelty to animals: that it will lead on to cruelty to men. Animals provide a testing ground for benevolence and humanity” (Cosslett 10).<sup>68</sup> Evincing an even more pronounced link between literary talking animals and anti-cruelty animal movements is the form of animal autobiography wherein the creation of animal subjectivity depends on a voiced consciousness. The animal-narrator’s possession of language in these texts serves as a major point of continuity between reader and animal. As a result, Coslett argues, this mode of forging readerly identification elides examination of the differences between animal and human consciousness (*Talking Animals in British Children’s Fiction, 1786-1914* 70). One explanation for this effect lies in the animal autobiography’s oft-noted debt to slave narratives, exemplified famously by *Black Beauty*’s dubbing as *The Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the horse. To be taken seriously, scholars of slave narratives have pointed out, slaves frequently had to adopt the discourses of abolitionists; in animal autobiography, animals likewise must adhere to rational human discourse (*Talking Animals in British Children’s Fiction* 81).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Compare Locke’s admiration for the fable to Rousseau’s injunction against the form in *Emile* (1762): “I maintain that the child does not understand the fables he is taught. For no matter how much effort you take to make them simple, the teaching you wish to extract from them demands ideas which he cannot grasp; meanwhile the poetical form which makes it easier to remember makes it harder to understand, so that clearness is sacrificed to facility” (343). Rousseau goes on to offer an in-depth critique of the fable “The Crow and the Fox,” illustrating the dangerous misreading a child was liable to perform. Jayne Lewis’s *The English Fable* shows the ways in which fables were also crucial to contexts beyond children’s literature in eighteenth England, as her study explores the complex uses fables served during a transitional period in England’s political history. In line with Lockean-inspired beliefs about fable’s connection to the material world, Lewis proposes that fables become a preferred form within a culture skeptical about the integrity of figurative language in part because they are able to “guide symbolic action back to its manifest origins in the physical world” (9).

<sup>68</sup>Again, it is important to keep in mind how such sentiments can be viewed as part of the consolidation of middle-class authority. Kenyon-Jones explains that Locke integrates into his teachings on the value of being kind of animals for children the related need for children to also be civil to servants, the additional benefit of such a practice being that “ ‘no part of their superiority will be thereby lost, but the distinction increased and their authority strengthened.” (qtd. In Kenyon-Jones 57).

<sup>69</sup>As Maude Hines shows, giving “voice” to the non-human even extends to plants in much 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-American botanical children’s literature (17).

Cosslett and other critics identify a departure from these markedly anthropomorphic representations originating in the late nineteenth century with the literary work of Ernest Thompson Seton, a self-proclaimed adherent to the scientific method of depicting the non-human that he contrasts with “the archaic method” of making the animals talk.<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Auerbach links this dimension of Seton’s style to London’s fictional approach (despite Theodore Roosevelt’s famous charge against London of “nature-faking” through his alleged literary humanization of animals) (90). The works of Seton and London, then, mark a shift away from literary treatments of animals found in both eighteenth-century children’s literature and animal autobiography that used the possession of language or voice to forge connections between animal characters and human readers. There is something important to observe in such a shift. If, as Coslett suggests, talking animal stories stress similarities between animal and human consciousness, it seems to me that such fictions hold less potential to fundamentally challenge or change human ways of being in the world. Conversely, fiction that emphasizes embodiment as a shared condition while at the same time highlighting the alterity of animal being may point toward a productive reshaping of human action. It is to this fiction that I now turn.

Depictions of canine phenomenology throughout *White Fang* offer alternatives to what phenomenological accounts characterize as humans’ “frontal” relationships to the surrounding environment and to human reliance on visual modes of perception. Phenomenological accounts link humans’ assumption of upright posture to a “frontal attitude” towards nature<sup>71</sup> where nature is “posited as an object over-against a subject contemplating them from the outside, whether

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<sup>70</sup>Seton makes this statement in a note to the reader in *Lives of the Hunted* (1901).

<sup>71</sup>Behnke notes also that the frontal attitude, for Merleau-Ponty, extends beyond nature to include Being, space, and duration.

from ‘above’ or directly ‘opposite’” (Behnke 95). Citing Merleau-Ponty’s observation that the earth or ground exists at the margins of perception, Elizabeth Behnke points out that in adopting an upright posture, humans “effect an oppositional counterposition to the supporting ground as well as a connection with it: we ‘resist’ that ‘heaviness’ or ‘heft’ usually called ‘gravity’ and establish a particular sort of relation that sets us over against the world. . .” (102). This frontal stance encourages the human spectator to approach nature as a “totality of ‘sheer things’ . . . as a determinate realm not only known by, but *dominated by*, a theorizing spectator in such a way that being-known (or being-object) becomes the measure of Being” (Behnke 95, my emphasis). The broader implications of one’s physical position vis-à-vis the surrounding world that these accounts offer attaches new significance to London’s painstakingly detailed depictions of animal activity.<sup>72</sup> Animal bodies, in fact, become nearly inextricable from their surroundings throughout *White Fang*. Presenting animal bodies that are literally in touch with the earth or ground in the rabbit chase scene early on, the narrator notes, “Both noses went down to the footprints in the snow. These footprints were very fresh. One Eye [dog name] ran ahead cautiously, his mate at his heels. The broad pads of their feet were spread wide and in contact with the snow were like velvet” (137) and “[a dog] sprang back with a snort of sudden fright, then shrank down to the snow and crouched, snarling threats at this thing of fear he did not understand” (137).

That this stance seems readily to give way to an “intermingling” of animal bodies with their surroundings is particularly evident in extended sequences detailing White Fang’s initial

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<sup>72</sup>Lee Clark Mitchell has argued that in London’s *The Sea Wolf*, a novel which does not represent animality but is instead concerned solely with the portrayal of human characters, the positively depicted actions of standing and the negatively drawn actions of falling or lying down represent an assertion of the “triumph of human development.” From these observations, Mitchell concludes that “the entire novel traces a rough Darwinian allegory of homo erectus, reflecting London’s rudimentary notion of the means by which the human body can be made to rise above an animal level” (“Becoming Someone in Jack London’s *The Sea-Wolf*” 5). I would be more convinced by such a claim, however, if Mitchell were to consider London’s fictional treatments of animal figures.



forays into the wilderness upon venturing out of his birthplace in the cave. The narrator states, “He inspected the grass beneath him, the moss-berry plant just beyond, and the dead trunk of the blasted pine that stood on the edge of an open space among the trees. A squirrel, running around the base of the trunk, came full upon him, and gave him a great fright. He cowered down and snarled. But the squirrel was as badly scared. It ran up the tree, and from a point of safety chattered back savagely” (160). Subsequent depictions emphasize that the wolf’s position vis-à-vis nature leaves him especially open to its influence: “It was by sheer blundering that he chanced upon the shrewdly hidden ptarmigan nest. He fell into it. He had essayed to walk along the trunk of a fallen pine. The rotten bark gave way under his feet, and with a despairing yep he pitched down the rounded descent, smashed through the leafage and stalks of a small bush, and in the heart of the bush, on the ground, fetched up amongst seven ptarmigan hicks” (161). The body’s intertwining with nature is perhaps most prominent in the episodes of White Fang’s encounter with the stream. Describing the wolf’s literal immersion in the surrounding environment, the narrator recounts, “He came down a shelving bank to the stream. He had never seen water before. The footing looked good. There were no inequalities of surface. He stepped boldly out on it; and went down, crying with fear, into the embrace of the unknown. It was cold, and he gasped, breathing quickly” (163). Following some further moment of uncertainty in the water, White Fang returns to the ground: “Below the rapid was a second pool, and here, captured by the eddy, he was gently borne to the bank and as gently deposited on a bed of gravel” (164). In the “intermingling” of the wolves with nature, these passages position the animal body as a medium that breaks down the separation between the animal presence and its surroundings.

The text’s emphasis on non-visual modes of animal perception also works to unsettle an orientation towards the world based on what Behnke, again drawing on phenomenology, names

as the “separativeness of vision.” Alluding to the limitations of the visual, Behnke describes vision as a “divisive, ‘partitive’ way of being attentive to our surroundings and to our fellow beings, seeing the latter not only as separate from us, but all too often as hostile to the self-interest of our own ‘I’” (104). She contrasts vision with other sensory modes that allow for greater opportunities for perceivers to arrive at “a sense of being a part of, rather than a spectator of, the open field of the visible” (105). In the novel, ample passages focusing on the wolves’ non-visual—auditory, olfactory—experience suggest the immersive, rather than separative, quality of this experience. Downplaying their reliance on vision, the narrator states, for example:

To [the wolves’] ears came the sounds of dogs, wrangling and scuffling, the guttural cries of men, the sharper voices of scolding women, and once the shrill and plaintive cry of a child. With the exception of the huge bulks of the skin lodges, little could be seen save the flames of the fire, broken by the movements of intervening bodies, and the smoke rising slowly on the quiet air. But to their nostrils came the myriad smells of an Indian camp, carrying a story that was largely incomprehensible to One Eye, but every detail of which the she-wolf knew. (140)

In stringing together an image of the wolves’ ears with the multiplicity of sounds in their surroundings, the very structure of the passage’s first sentence conveys the non-separativeness between body and environs that nonvisual modes of perception may encourage. Related passages intimate the particularly immersive effects of sound, indicating the ways that a listener is given over to sound in the act of listening. As the narrator notes, “When he dozed, upon his ears would steal the faint whispers of hidden trickles of running water, and he would rouse and listen intently. The sun had come back, and all the awakening Northland world was calling to

him. Life was stirring. The feel of spring was in the air, the feel of growing life under the snow, of sap ascending in the trees, of buds bursting the shackles of the frost” (145). Reinforcing the active nature of a sound that “steals,” the narrator likewise remarks that “a shrill and minute singing stole upon [the wolf’s] hearing” (145). Prompting the wolf’s attentive listening, sound’s representations here signal the non-visual’s role in promoting active exchanges between animal and environment. My point in highlighting London’s detailing of this canine orientation toward the world is not to suggest that humans are hopelessly limited in their possibilities for knowledge by their posture or accustomed reliance on visual perception. Rather, it seems that London’s representations of animal corporeality in *White Fang* encourage human readers to imagine that claiming and more fully inhabiting one’s embodied status might enable a more connective relationship with one’s surroundings. Such a relationship might, in turn, serve to widen humans’ scope of awareness and responsibility for both the human and non-human.

Throughout discussions of the senses, it is important to keep in mind the historicity of modes of perception that studies of modernism have importantly emphasized. Again, work on modernism has attempted to think about Walter Benjamin notion of a complex training to which the senses are subjected in modernity and to chart art’s various relations to modernization’s influence on the human sensorium. In this way, we might connect London’s emphasis on non-visual capacities to the epistemological “crisis” of vision originating in the nineteenth century that Martin Jay and others have emphasized in which “seeing is no longer knowing,” due in large part to new visual technologies that reveal how much the eye does not see (Darius 64).<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, London’s concentrated attention to the non-visual both in *White Fang* and *Martin*

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<sup>73</sup>The term crisis here refers to the recognition of human limitations exposed by the advent of visual technologies. Indeed, Jay’s notion of a crisis in this context is a bit misleading in that new technologies such as the camera and film also enabled new work that laid the groundwork for modernism.

*Eden* perhaps owes something to the rupturing of sensory operations and the ensuing division of the labor of the senses that emerges with inventions such as the telephone discussed by Sara Danius and others. As Danius shows, this rupture opens up new domains of aesthetic exploration for modernist writers who register in their works both its pains and its pleasures. Sound, in particular, as Tim Armstrong indicates, attains unique status for modernists; as mentioned previously, hearing “immerses us in a world which is more immediate and less controllable than that of vision” (109).<sup>74</sup> In this way, then, we might place London within a modernist trajectory; like modernist writings, London’s fictions mark a particular interest in exploring experience that lies within domains beyond the visual.

Indicating an even stronger capacity for inviting an animal’s absorption in its surroundings is *White Fang*’s rendering of canine dependence on smell:

One moonlight night, running through the quiet forest, One Eye suddenly halted. His muzzle went up, his tail stiffened and his nostrils dilated as he scented the air. One foot also he held up, after the manner of a dog. He was not satisfied, and he continued to smell the air, striving to understand the message borne upon it to him. One careless sniff had satisfied his mate, and she trotted on to reassure him. Though he was still dubious, and could not forbear an occasional halt in order more carefully to study the warning. She crept out cautiously on the edge of a large open space in the midst of the trees. For some time she stood alone. Then One Eye, creeping and crawling, every sense on the alert, every hair radiating infinite suspicion, joined her. They stood side by side, watching and listening, and smelling. (140)

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<sup>74</sup>This is evident, for example, in what Danius deems James Joyce’s “aesthetics of immediacy” (147-188).

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno further characterize the absorptive quality of smell that is evident in this passage, notably remarking on smell's potential to violate the separateness inhering in the visual. They explain, "Of all the senses, that of smell—which is attracted without objectifying—bears clearest witness to the urge to lose oneself in and become the 'other.' As perception and the perceived—both are united—smell is more expressive than the other senses. When we see we remain what we are; but when we smell we are taken over by otherness" (184).<sup>75</sup> Again, we might note something of a pre-figuration of modernist experiments here: Proust and the madeleine, for instance, epitomizes the sense that less-privileged senses may code or shield fugitive memories that are especially precious because they are not part of grand narratives and the visual coding that perhaps reinforces them. George Herbert Mead's provocative statements regarding animals also involve imagining ways in which they move beyond rigidly individuated selfhood. Postulating that a human organism doesn't recognize a sensation as its own until a self has arisen, Mead proposes that an animal "has no self." He explains, "We have no reason to assume, for example that in lower animals there are such entities as selves; and if no such entities, then that which takes place within the organism cannot be identified with such a self. There is pain; there is pleasure; there are feelings which are not exactly painful or pleasurable, such as heat or cold...But the individual animal does not associate them with a self because it has no self; it is not a self" (*On Social Psychology*, 42).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Deleuze and Guattari's language of "entering into composition with," I think, also usefully characterizes this mode of being, as they note, "It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life. The street enters into composition with the horse, just as the dying rat enters into composition with the air, and the beast and full moon enter into composition with each other" (262).

<sup>76</sup>Similarly resisting a "self-positing identity" as a necessary individuating principle, Alfonso Lingis writes, "How myopic if the notion that a form is the principle of individuation, or a substance occupying a place to the exclusion of other substances, or that the inner organization, or the self-positing identity of a subject is an entity's principle of individuation!" (39).

Consideration of animals' "pack modes" more generally and within *White Fang* specifically extend this notion of a de-individuating quality common to animality. Underscoring the pack mode's centrality to animal being, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari remark, "What we are saying is that every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. That it has pack modes, rather than characteristics, even if further distinctions within these modes are called for. It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal. We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity" (239-240).<sup>77</sup> Deleuze and Guattari go on to characterize multiplicity, stating, "A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a center of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension without changing its nature. Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, *it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors*" (249, emphasis in original).<sup>78</sup> The emphasis here on the presence of dimensions, rather than singular elements, as defining characteristics of the pack underlines a sense of de-individuation

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<sup>77</sup>Distinguishing their sense of pack from its typical understanding vis-a-vis human social formations, they clarify, "We do not wish to say that certain animals live in packs. We want nothing to do with ridiculous evolutionary classifications à la Lorenz according to which there are inferior packs and superior societies" (239). Lingis also comments on the nature of this "fascination," as he notes, "What is fascinating in the pack, the gangs of the savannah and the night, the swarming, is the multiplicity in us—the human form and the nonhuman, vertebrate and invertebrate, animal and vegetable, conscious and unconscious, movements and intensities in us that are not yoked to some conscious goal or purpose that is or can be justified in some capitalist program for economic growth or some transcendental or theological fantasy of object-constitution or creativity seated in us" (40).

<sup>78</sup>Reading Deleuze and Guattari along this line, Birke and Parisi write, "Human (Western) beliefs in individuality and boundaries are also threatened by symbiosis—that is, mutually beneficial and cooperative living arrangements between two organisms. This is a kind of becoming in which an organism is opened to others and to change through symbiosis which 'brings into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation'" (66).

within the pack. The language of dimension also seems to indicate that the pack's actions might be conceived of as a kind of changing shape.

Depictions of pack formation in *White Fang* illustrate the pack's keen response, or changing shape, to the surrounding environment. Emphasizing a collective corporeality, the narrator relates the wolves' situation:

Had there been food, love-making and fighting would have gone on apace, and the pack formation would have been broken up. But the situation of the pack was desperate. It was lean with long-standing hunger. It ran below its ordinary speed. At the rear limped the weak members, the very young and the very old. At the front were the strongest. Yet all were more like skeletons than full-bodied wolves. Nevertheless, with the exception of the ones that limped, the movements of the animals were effortless and tireless. Their stringy muscles seemed founts of inexhaustible energy. Behind every steel-like contraction of a muscle, lay another steel-like contraction of a muscle, and another, and another, apparently without end. (136)

The passage suggests how the pack takes shape according to external circumstances and these circumstances, in turn, seem to bring the dimensions of the pack into focus. Indeed, as intimated here, the pack begins to break up when conditions improve. Perhaps not surprisingly, in addition, we later see that human appropriation of the pack for economic gain creates harmful differentiations within and distortions of the pack that result in White Fang's alienation from the other wolves. Such interventions clearly serve to demonstrate a potential disruption to the animals' less individuated modes of action.

The implications of animals' connective relationships to their surroundings can be more fully appreciated in several passages in the novel related to dog loyalty. These passages expose a marked asymmetry in the sense of consideration or responsibility for the Other that animals and humans express. Referring, perhaps ironically, to White Fang's impression of humans as gods, the narrator describes White Fang's relationship to his first master, Gray Beaver: "For the possession of a flesh-and-blood god, he exchanged his own liberty. Food and fire, protection and companionship, were some of the things he received from the god. In return he guarded the god's property, defended his body, worked for him, and obeyed him" (128). The narrator further notes, "The possession of a god implies service. White Fang's was a service of duty and awe, but not of love. . ." (128). This discrimination of fidelity from the more familiarly humanized sentiment of "love" is elaborated in subsequent passages: "[White Fang] did not love Gray Beaver, yet, even in the face of his will and his anger, he was faithful to him. He could not help it. This faithfulness was a quality of the clay that composed him. It was the quality that was peculiarly the possession of his kind; the quality that set apart his species from all other species; the quality that had enabled the wolf and the wild dog to come in from the open and be the companions of man" (231). The linking of faithfulness to the "clay" that composes White Fang indicates that his very materiality figures into his sense of responsibility for Gray Beaver.

White Fang's loyalty to Gray Beaver persists, even when Gray Beaver sells him to the abusive Beauty Smith. Describing his attempts to return to Gray Beaver, the narrator notes, "White Fang still clung to him and would not give him up. Gray Beaver had betrayed and forsaken him, but that had no effect upon him. Not for nothing had he surrendered himself body and soul to Gray Beaver. There had been no reservation on White Fang's part, and the bond was not to be broken easily" (231). Upon Beauty Smith's return to retrieve White Fang, the narrator



remarks, “Gray Beaver looked on stolidly while the white man wielded the whip. He gave no protection. It was no longer his dog” (232). The lack of regard for White Fang is emphasized further in the text’s detailing of the abuse he comes to suffer not just from Beauty Smith but from the many spectators who come to witness the fights between the wolf and other animals that Smith orchestrates for monetary gain: “Life had become a hell to [White Fang]. He had not been made for the close confinement wild beasts endure at the hands of men. And yet it was in precisely this way that he was treated. Men stared at him, poked sticks between the bars to make him snarl, and then laughed at him” (235). The contrast evident in these depictions indicates a clear disjunction between animals’ and humans’ level of consideration or responsibility for those that surround them. In a sense, this theme recalls Jean Jacques Rousseau’s notion that the qualities of compassion are more prevalent in animals than in humans, that compassion “must have been more perfect in a state of nature than it is in a state of reason” since “It is philosophy that isolates him [Man] and bids him say, at the sight of the misfortunes of others: ‘Perish if you will, I am secure’” (*A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* 68). Karla Armbruster has read the fictional trope of dog loyalty as celebrating human domains of activity, arguing that narratives in which dogs end up saving humans (evident in the conclusion of *White Fang*) show that dogs must ultimately relinquish nature in favor of culture. However, London’s emphasis on dog loyalty here serves instead as affirmation of the potential effects—encouraging a greater responsibility for bodies across the boundaries of difference, epitomized here by the species boundary between dogs and humans—of dogs’ more connective orientation towards their surroundings.

Interestingly, this expression of canine loyalty to humans becomes more complex in the culminating scenes of the novel which stage an interspecies, intercorporeal exchange. In these

scenes, the hand plays a central role, a feature made all the more significant by debates within contemporary animal philosophy and in the social thought of London's own time. Suggesting that the hand denotes a clear separation between humans and animals, Martin Heidegger contends that while animals can only grasp, the human hand surpasses the status of a bodily organ of gripping (Derrida 173).<sup>79</sup> For Heidegger, the human hand is notably inseparable from language and thought, as he contends that every motion of the hand is rooted in speaking and thinking; the hand in this way is further distinguished from the mere prehensile, grasping capacity he associates with animal limbs. The hand's inextricable connection to language and thought, according to Heidegger, makes the human solely capable of giving or generosity. Characteristically contesting the feasibility of any clear distinction between giving and taking, Derrida counters the humanism of Heidegger's speculations.

Especially interesting to consider in relation to both this debate between Heidegger and Derrida and London's novel are George H. Mead's rather extensive writings on the hand's role in instituting the human-animal species boundary. Resonating strongly with Heidegger's account, Mead connects the development of thought and language to the hand: "There is, as we have seen, another very important phase in the development of the human animal which is perhaps quite as essential as speech for the development of man's peculiar intelligence, and that is the use of the hand for the isolation of physical things. Speech and the hand go along together in the development of the social human being" (237, *Mind, Self and Society*). Shedding more light on this connection, David L. Miller proposes that in Mead's view, language would not have emerged if hands hadn't been freed from supporting the body and thus capable of dissecting and

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<sup>79</sup>Specifically, Heidegger asserts, "Apes, *for example*, have organs that can grasp, but they have no hand" (173, original emphasis).

reassembling objects (62-3). In this conceptualization, the development of language is dependent upon developments in technology which are, in turn, dependent on language.

Mead further thinks about the hand in terms of its capacity to distinguish human “instincts” from those of animals. According to Mead, the human hand possesses the capacity to “break up” human impulses into distinct “manipulatory” and “consummatory” phases of the act. Hands seem, for Mead, to mediate between instinct or needs and their satisfaction, thereby compelling us to be aware of the means by which we come into contact with the world and access and transform it. Drawing a contrast between human and canine alimentary methods, he explains:

The hand is responsible for what I term physical things, distinguishing the physical thing from what I call the consummation of the act. If we took our food as dogs do by the very organs by which we masticate it, we should not have any ground for distinguishing the food as a physical thing from the actual consummation of the act, the consumption of the food. We should reach it and seize it with the teeth, and the very act of taking hold of it would be the act of eating it. But with the human animal the hand is interposed between the consummation and the getting of the object to the mouth. In that case we are manipulating a physical thing. Such a thing comes in between the beginning of the act and its final consummation. (184, *Mind, Self and Society*)<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Later elaborating, he notes, “However, man’s manual contacts, intermediate between the beginnings and the ends of his acts, provide a multitude of different stimuli to a multitude of different ways of doing things, and thus invite alternative impulses to express themselves in the accomplishment of his acts, when obstacles and hindrances arise. Man’s hands have served greatly to break up fixed instincts by giving him a world full of a number of things” (*Mind, Self, and Society* 363).

A highly charged image throughout *White Fang*, the human hand immediately breaks down as an entity separating humans from or elevating them over animals; an early scene in the novel shows one of the men intently examining his own hand:

As he piled wood on the fire he discovered an appreciation of his own body which he had never felt before. He watched his moving muscles and was interested in the cunning mechanism of his fingers. By the light of the fire he crooked his fingers slowly and repeatedly, now one at a time, now all together, spreading them wide or making quick gripping movements...It fascinated him, and he grew suddenly fond of this subtle flesh of his that worked so beautifully and smoothly and delicately. (128)

Underscoring the sense of bodily materiality in this depiction is the man's subsequent awareness of the animals' presence. Upon noting the wolves around him, the narrator observes that "this living flesh, was no more than so much meat, a quest of ravenous animals, to be torn and slashed by their hungry fangs, to be sustenance to them as the moose and the rabbit had often been sustenance to him" (128). Their presence renders the hand he admires as flesh common to other animals.

Depictions of White Fang's reactions to human hands challenge any sense of a purely benevolent generosity attached to humans' hands. Indeed these scenes cast the manipulative prowess of hands in unequivocally negative terms. The narrator notes, "Besides, [White Fang] did not like the hand of the man-animals. He was suspicious of them. It was true that they sometimes gave meat, but more often they gave hurt. Hands were things to keep away from. They hurled stones, wielded sticks and clubs and whips, administered slaps and clouts, and, when they touched him, were cunning to hurt with pinch and twist and wrench" (204). White

Fang even registers the damaging effects of children's hands: "In strange villages he had encountered the hands of the children and learned that they were cruel to hurt...When they came near with their ominous hands, he got up" (204). Here, hands serve to emblemize humans' capacity to inflict pain on others, contributing to the separation and alienation evident in White Fang's urge to "keep away" and to move out of their range.

Yet a hand proves crucial to the exchange that takes place between human and animal in the novel's culminating scenes. As a result of the cruel treatment White Fang endures at the *hands* of men, he turns particularly ferocious and consequently comes to be feared and despised by both humans and the other wolves.<sup>81</sup> When his new owner Weedon Scott, who incidentally rescues him from the abusers, attempts to pet him, White Fang bites his hand. Although White Fang anxiously awaits his punishment, remaining ever suspicious of the hand, Scott instead works to gain his trust by petting and talking to him (though exactly what Scott says is notably absent from the text). Highlighting the developing coordination between the two, the narrator remarks, "For a time White Fang growled in unison with him, a correspondence of rhythm being established between growl and voice. But the god talked on interminably. He talked to White Fang as White Fang had never been talked to before. He talked softly and soothingly, with a gentleness that somehow, somewhere touched White Fang. In spite of himself and all the pricking warnings of his instinct, White Fang began to have confidence in this god. He had a feeling of security that was belied by all his experience with men" (255). These on-going interactions constitute a negotiation of trust that takes place some time, for, as the narrator notes

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<sup>81</sup>This turn of events resonates with Philip Armstrong's observation about the ways in which human exploitation of animals and disruption of their environments, as in the nineteenth-century whaling industry, could actually influence and amplify animals' degree of ferocity or "wildness" (1045).

of White Fang, “He could not forget in a day all the evil that had been wrought him at the hands of men” (257). Eventually, though, we learn that:

The hand lifted and descended again in a patting, caressing movement. This continued, but every time the hand lifted the hair lifted under it. And every time the hand descended the ears flattened down and a cavernous growl surged in his throat...But the god talked on softly, and ever the hand rose and fell with nonhostile pats. White Fang expressed dual feelings. It was distasteful to his instinct. It restrained him, opposed the will of him toward personal liberty. And yet it was not physically painful. On the contrary, it was even pleasant, in a physical way. The patting movement slowly and carefully changed to a rubbing of the ears about their bases, and the physical pleasure even increased a little.

(257)

The language of movement and intensity here is especially notable in light of Deleuze’s and Alfonso Lingis’s emphases on the key role of these aspects in human-animal encounters.<sup>82</sup> As they suggest, movement and intensity allow for a kind of meeting of human and animal energies.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Deleuze asserts, “It is a question of composing a body with the animal, a body without organs defined by zones of intensity or proximity” (274) and further instructs, “Do not imitate a dog, but make your organism enter into composition with something else in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter” (274). Likewise noting the features of human-animal exchange, Lingis remarks, “The movements and intensities of our bodies compose with the movements and intensities of toucans and wolves, jellyfish and whales” (43).

<sup>83</sup>Jonathan Auerbach similarly observes an “intense intimacy” between Buck and Thornton in *The Call of the Wild* that he argues borders on the homoerotic (105). Mark Seltzer, whose broader aim it is to show in *Bodies and Machines* the “naturalization of the disciplines of machine culture,” has also commented on this aspect of the text, arguing in a Foucauldian vein that love is combined with discipline to ensure the outcome of disciplinization (169-170). In this way, White Fang learns to “love at once the pleasure of unnatural acts (acts contrary to every ‘mandate of his instinct’) and the pain of turning from ‘the natural’ to ‘the cultural’” (169). Here, I am more in

This exchange is rendered a crucial element in countering the process by which White Fang had been “formed and hardened into the Fighting Wolf.” Its import is emphasized in the following highly tactile description that recalls London’s use of the clay metaphor in *Martin Eden* that I discussed in Chapter 1:

To accomplish the change was like a reflux of being, and this when the plasticity of youth was no longer his; when the fiber of him had become tough and knotty; when the warp and woof of him had made of him an adamantine texture, harsh, and unyielding; when the fact of his spirit had become iron and all his instinct and axioms had crystallized into set rules, cautions, dislikes and desires. Yet again, in this new orientation, it was the thumb of circumstance that pressed and prodded him, softening that which had become hard and remolding it into fairer form.

Weedon Scott was in truth his thumb. (259)

It seems, then, that the generosity of the hand is most fully realized in this connective, corporeal exchange, rather than operating purely within the realm of language and thought as Heidegger and Mead would have.

*White Fang*’s narrative on the whole might be read as the crisis and eventual overcoming of the threat that White Fang will, in fact, become “hardened,” or irretrievably separate, losing the connectivity to his surroundings that marks so many of the passages I pointed out earlier and is especially evident in his unmatched (at least by humans) loyalty across the species divide. In this way, London goes further than simply imagining the possibilities of a non-human stance; he usefully emphasizes its precariousness. In the end, though, it remains striking, I think, that an

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agreement with Pease who, in directly countering Seltzer’s claim, points to the possibility that the animal, in fact, poses a challenge to disciplinary processes.

exchange across bodily boundaries aids in redeeming and revitalizing the qualities that make this stance potentially valuable to human and non-human alike.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>The notion of cross-species exchange also ties into the question of whether one's identity need be firmly yoked to one's lineage or whether it might instead arise from one's "affiliations." The character of Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) is notable here. John McBratney points out that the animal characters, in fact, stage such a debate over what determines identity in which "Shere Khan and his supporters argue for ostracism because for them Mowgli, by 'blood,' has no place in the jungle. Mother and Father Wolf, his teachers Baloo and Bagheera, and the wolf chief Akela contend, however, that since Mowgli has been inducted into the tribe by the proper ceremony, he is '[their] brother in all but blood'" (285). As McBratney suggests, Kipling's fictional animals posed an especially salient question for the late nineteenth century given that "in the history of debate about race, [Shere Khan's] position roughly corresponds to that held by late-nineteenth-century proponents of typology" (285). The case of *The Jungle Book* indicates that for humans to adopt an animal style of being, both within a nineteenth-century context but also beyond it, ruptures the species boundary in such a way as to represent a deeply anti-essentialist act.



**3.0 BOYS INTERRUPTED?: PREGNANCY AND THE MALE BILDUNGSROMAN  
IN THEODORE DREISER'S *AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY* AND FRANK NORRIS'S  
*VANDOVER AND THE BRUTE***

That inescapable animal walks with me,  
He's followed me since the black womb held,  
Moves where I move, distorting my gesture,  
A caricature, a swollen shadow,  
A stupid clown of the spirit's motive,  
Perplexes and affronts with his own darkness,  
The secret life of belly and bone,  
Opaque, too near, my private, yet unknown. . . ( "The Heavy Bear," Delmore Schwartz)

Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) and Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) are male-authored narratives featuring male protagonists and containing elements common to familiar tales of masculine development. Influencing each of these narratives above all else, though, is a woman's pregnancy—specifically, the pregnancy of a working-class woman. What is particularly remarkable about these novels is that, on further examination, each presents an uncanny connection between the woman's experience of unwanted pregnancy in the first part of the narrative and the man's "demise" in the latter portion of the narrative: Clyde's experience in prison and his impending electrocution in *An American Tragedy* eerily echo the circumstances surrounding Roberta's pregnancy, while Norris's *Vandover* is eventually inhabited and overtaken by a being who "lives in his flesh." In this chapter, I examine the interruptions that take place in two novels by Dreiser and Norris that have often been cited as

“classic” instances of literary naturalism. Rather than reading these novels as typical naturalist “plots of decline” in which women characters function as a debilitating source of men’s compromised development, I suggest that these narratives instead trace a process of sensitization on the part of their protagonists, a sensitization registered most profoundly through depictions of the body.<sup>85</sup>

The central role of pregnancy in these novels is especially significant since the pregnant body offers a special conception of personhood, one that exemplifies the relational notion of a body continuous with another body. As Susan Bordo further indicates, “the unique configuration of embodiment presented in pregnancy—the having of an other within oneself, simultaneously both part of oneself and separate from oneself” might “constitute a distinctively female epistemological and ethical resource” (36).<sup>86</sup> Dreiser and Norris draw on this “unique configuration of embodiment” represented in pregnancy to reshape the course of their male protagonists’ development. Each novel interrupts a familiar course of masculine development, dramatically embroiling their male characters in female characters’ experiences of pregnancy. In

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<sup>85</sup>As I explained earlier, American literature’s emphasis on the deleterious effects of the feminine has been taken up in criticism situating turn-of-the-century American literature in relation to a “crisis of masculinity,” or a feminized loss of “firmness” of character (Pearl James 8) engendered by certain conditions of modernity—including feminist movements—at the turn of the century. In the context of turn-of-the-century literature, Seltzer’s reading of technology as a kind of reclamation of masculine autonomy stands as a notable example of this argument. Such arguments also, of course, recall more entrenched readings of novels that underscore a more general rejection of feminine influence. As I have also pointed out in an earlier chapter, Fleissner’s study has done much to overturn these accounts as they impact our understanding of so-called naturalist texts. Fleissner also usefully proposes as I do in this chapter a shift away from reading many of these texts in terms of plots of decline, either on an individual or historical level (*Women, Compulsion, and Modernity* 7).

<sup>86</sup>Bordo articulates this notion in the form of a rhetorical question, asking specifically, “Is pregnancy merely a cultural construction, capable of being shaped into multitudinous social forms? Or does the unique configuration of embodiment presented in pregnancy—the having of an other within oneself, simultaneously both part of oneself and separate from oneself—constitute a distinctively female epistemological and ethical resource?” (36). Regarding the issue of cultural construction that I also raised in the introduction, she further notes that “Many feminists remain agnostic or ambivalent about the role of biology and sexual ‘different’; justifiably fearful of ideas that seem to assert an unalterable, essential female nature, they are nonetheless concerned that too exclusive an emphasis on culture will obscure powerful, and potentially culturally transformative, aspects of women’s experience” (36).

*An American Tragedy* and *Vandover and the Brute*, Dreiser and Norris, I argue, employ the figure of the pregnant body to offer an alternative vision of masculine development that fundamentally incorporates sensitivity to and serious regard for the experiences of other bodies.

In *Vandover and the Brute* the protagonist, Vandover, begins life and later becomes a promising student bound for Harvard University and graduate studies of art in Paris. Upon returning from college, Vandover makes the acquaintance of Ida, a working-class woman, and eventually impregnates her. Fearing the consequences of pregnancy and lack of support from Vandover, Ida commits suicide. The remainder of the novel follows the troubles that ensue for Vandover over fallout from the situation, most notably his own descent into hysterical fits of “insanity.” Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* also features a central male character who shows early signs of promise. Based on the 1906 real-life murder of Grace Brown by Chester Gillette in Cortland, New York, Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* (1925) traces central character Clyde Griffiths’s attempts to secure financial and social success by working his way up in his wealthy uncle’s factory and winning the affections of the well-to-do Sondra. However, Clyde’s romantic involvement with Roberta, one of the factory workers, eventually leads to her pregnancy. Upon failing in his efforts to help Roberta obtain an abortion, Clyde resolves to create the conditions by which Roberta ends up drowning in a lake. The murder act itself is ambiguous in this way because, although Clyde seems to intend to kill Roberta, the actual occurrence could also be construed as an accident. Clyde is ultimately convicted for Roberta’s murder and is sentenced to death by electrocution.

Situating Dreiser's novel within the context of the rise of consumer culture,<sup>87</sup> several contemporary critics indicate that a kind of historically-specific determinism operates in *An American Tragedy* (in contrast to earlier naturalist critics who have often understood philosophical determinism to operate in a vacuum). Moreover, critics have implied this view in readings that emphasize how Dreiser's novel shows the far-reaching extent to which the self's relation to others is governed by conditions of capitalism. Specifically, in the consumer culture that forms the backdrop of Dreiser's novel, Paul Orlov and Chip Rhodes suggest, Clyde is acutely aware of others, but only insofar as they help to affirm his own self worth in an acquisitive, materialistic society. Orlov notes that in the novel "personal identity is reduced by society's values to a matter of having (and appearing) at a cost of true (intrinsic) being" and, furthermore, that the "emphasis upon looks and money implicitly suggests that the world in which Clyde absorbs his beliefs and goals subscribes to a way of seeing that discovers meaning only in the surfaces of things and people" (107). Both Orlov and Rhodes liken Clyde to David Riesman's "other-directed" person,<sup>88</sup> also a product of twentieth-century mass culture, who demonstrates the "tendency to be sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others" (Orlov 138).<sup>89</sup> Despite its name, this other-directedness quality clearly serves to further the self's interests. Not surprisingly, Orlov casts this version of selfhood that he understands Clyde to

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<sup>87</sup>Indeed, emphasis on the relationship between Dreiser's works and consumer desire has been a dominant theme of Dreiser criticism, even for critics who claim much distance from the category of naturalism. Dubbed by Bill Brown as "the writer most devoted to things" (84-5), Dreiser, for many critics, provides insight into the formation of modern consumer subjectivity. On this subject, see, for instance, Rachel Bowlby's *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, Walter Benn Michaels's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, and Joseph Karaganis's "Naturalism's Nation: Toward *An American Tragedy*."

<sup>88</sup>Orlov and Rhodes read Clyde as prefiguring the personage detailed in Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950).

<sup>89</sup>Rhodes further connects Riesman's other-directed figure to the distinction frequently noted by American Studies critics between character, representative of a nineteenth-century producer oriented culture, and personality, emerging in a twentieth-century consumer culture dominated by mass media (387).

represent as unequivocally negative, gesturing to a kind of social determinism. As he concludes, “Both Riesman’s study and Dreiser’s story of Clyde show that there are grave consequences for the nature of selfhood when people look largely to their social environment, and to their contemporaries within it, for direction as well as for approval” (138).<sup>90</sup>

At the opposite end of the naturalist spectrum, Vandover’s character in Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute* comes to be understood by some critics as an effect of biological determinism since it appears the instincts of his body overtake him until he literally devolves, or regresses into an animalistic state of insanity. In familiar readings of the novel, *Vandover and the Brute* demonstrates “naturalism’s fear of embodiment and biological determinism” (Goodling 3). Rejecting naturalism’s equation with pessimistic determinism, other critics have gone on to assert these novels’ ultimate belief in the notion of a self-determined, autonomous agent capable of overcoming the limitations imposed by the biological body.<sup>91</sup> More contemporary criticism indicts naturalist texts for ultimately resorting to biological explanations (usually those that emphasize the inevitability and primacy of self-serving instincts) in order to make sense of inequities in the social world. Some criticism of this nature sees Norris’s novel as growing directly out of late nineteenth-century theories of degeneration. Along this line, interpretation of the body in *Vandover* has been an issue for critics who, assuming that the novel presents the body as hopelessly degenerate, have detected an understandably problematic representation of the effeminate, artistic (and thus possibly homosexual in the readings of those critics) Vandover

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<sup>90</sup>Philip Fisher has attributed the emergence of a similar “externalized” conception of selfhood to turn-of-the century urbanization. In Fisher’s conception, urban spaces constitute heterogeneous “worlds” to which persons must constantly adjust themselves. Like Orlov, Fisher expresses pessimism about this operation of the self in noting that “Clyde is askew within every world is demonstrated in his helplessness when he tries to connect within a world” (132).

<sup>91</sup>As I mentioned in the introduction, June Howard characterizes this move on the part of critics to rescue naturalist texts from their equation with pessimistic determinism in pointing out that “the next most frequently made observation about naturalism must surely be that it is *not* pessimistic determinism” (36).

as being in possession of a degenerate body.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, much has remained at stake in these readings of the body as fundamentally degenerate and governed by instincts that cause harm to the self and others.

My own reading of corporeality in both of these novels challenges this dim view of a person's capacity for meaningful social relations, which view underlies critical accounts of these fictions. Whereas critics of *An American Tragedy* virtually ignore the role of the body in Dreiser's novel, *Vandover and the Brute*'s critics have heavily relied on a questionable, I think, conception of Norris's treatment of embodiment. In the case of Dreiser's novel, I do not dispute the impact of modernity on sensitizing the self to one's surroundings that other critics have underscored.<sup>93</sup> However, in showing that it is the body, in particular that becomes sensitized to its surroundings, Dreiser, reveals the body's capacity to encourage far less self-interested ways of operating than critics predict. In this way, I find that the body is a crucial medium between self and world or self and other that has been overlooked in criticism of the novel outlined above. With regard to Norris's novel, all of the readings described above leave unquestioned the assumption that Norris's renderings of embodiment demonstrate its largely negative impact on

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<sup>92</sup>See Seitler (525-562).

<sup>93</sup>Indeed, some of Dreiser's other writings suggest that modern conditions might activate the body as a center of consciousness in ways that paradoxically serve to challenge the privileging of individual interests thought to operate in consumer culture. It is surprisingly fruitful to consider, for example, how Dreiser's philosophically-waxing narrator sheds doubt upon the usefulness of isolated mental space within the context of modernity. In an observation that seems to anticipate some of the insights of Walter Benjamin (as Bill Brown has also noted), the narrator of *Jennie Gerhardt* intimates the difficulty in assessing and depicting interiority's relation to character motivation and action: "There are some minds, fairly endowed with the power to see into things, that are nevertheless overwhelmed by the evidences of life and are confused. We live in an age in which the impact of materialized forces is well-nigh irresistible; the spiritual nature is overwhelmed by the shock" (125). Articulating recognizable modern conditions, the narrator refers to the "complicated development of our material civilization," naming the familiar litany of developments ranging from the railroad to telephone that "have so combined to produce what may be termed a kaleidoscopic glitter, a dazzling and confusing showpiece which is much more apt to weary and undo than to enlighten and strengthen the observing mind" (125). The narrator concludes, "Our modern brain-pan does not seem capable of receiving, sorting, and storing the vast army of facts and impression which present themselves daily" (125). In undermining the notion that the mind constitutes a site of control, these observations help to account for turn-of-the-century novels' attention to the body as a center of consciousness.

persons' relations to each other. Far from rejecting identification with the body, *Vandover and the Brute*, I propose, suggests a promise in embracing a conception of self that more fully integrates acknowledgment of the body.

As I indicated in the opening of this chapter, both Dreiser and Norris take up pregnancy, an especially interesting case of embodiment, within narratives of masculine development. The prominent role of pregnancy in novels by Dreiser and Norris is noteworthy simply given the fact that representations of pregnancy and childbirth in female-authored U.S. literature only just begin to emerge around the turn of the century. Michele Lise Tarter notes the longstanding cultural taboo of pregnancy reinforced by “patriarchy’s historical erasure and/or control of the subject of childbirth in literary discourse” (19).<sup>94</sup> Moreover, many of these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary treatments of prospective maternity are marked by an acute sense of horror. In one of the culminating episodes of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), for instance, Edna Pontellier contemplates the “scene of torture” in which her friend Adele Ratignolle gives birth:

Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and

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<sup>94</sup>Tess Coslett characterizes H. G. Wells’s response to one of the twentieth century’s earliest fictional depictions of pregnancy and childbirth as typifying attitudes surrounding this dearth of images: “The distaste for some male critics for the subject is voiced by H. G. Wells, reacting to Enid Bagnold’s 1938 English novel, *The Squire*, whose plot is constructed round a birth seen from the perspective of the mother, a strong, central female character. Wells felt as if ‘I’d been attacked by a multitude of many-breasted women...and thrown into a washing basket full of used nursery napkins’” (*Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses on Motherhood* 1).

go...With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture. (145-46)

Of course, read in the context of the novel's focus on Edna's growing dissatisfaction with the limitations she perceives to have distorted her life, her response here suggests that it is not simply "Nature" but also social conditions which render maternal roles so burdensome.

Indeed, this sense of the horror of pregnancy in the context of adverse social conditions is even more pronounced in early twentieth-century narratives centered on the pregnancies of women with far less class privilege than either Edna or Adele. Marking a distinct departure from the veiled references to pregnancy and parturition characterizing literature prior to this moment, Edith Summers Kelley's 1923 novel *Weeds* centers on the experiences of a Kentucky tenant farmer, Judith Pippinger, who consecutively bears three children and becomes pregnant with a fourth due to an affair with an out-of-towner. A kind of rewriting of Chopin's ending of *The Awakening*, Judith's suicide attempt near the end of the novel fails, causing a miscarriage. In what Allison Berg calls the first extended scene of childbirth in literature, Judith "trembled violently with terror of what was to befall her" and "stretched out on the bed as on some grisly rack of torture, she still gasped, strained, ground her teeth and uttered again and again the growl of struggle ending in the fierce snarl of agony" (qtd. in Berg 88-89). Less graphic but expressing a similar sense of terror are Edith Wharton's depictions of Charity Royall's pregnancy in *Summer* (1917). Rescued as a child by the abusive Lawyer Royall from 'the Mountain,' a rural area of abject poverty, Charity eventually becomes pregnant as a result of her short-lived relationship with Lucius Harney, an architect traveling through the town. Seized by fear and dread upon learning at nearly the same time of both her pregnancy and Harney's plans to abandon her for another woman, Charity "pressed her temples hard between her damp hands,



steadying herself against the desk while the wave of sickness swept over her. Little by little it subsided, and after a few minutes she stood up, shaken and terrified, groped for her hat, and stumbled out into the air” (210) and the narrator subsequently notes that “of a sudden, there came to her the grave surprise of motherhood” (211). Kathy Fedorko, who notably deems Charity one of Wharton’s “trapped Gothic heroines,” observes that by the novel’s end, facing the prospect of life with the lawyer, Charity descends into a state of “regression and deathlike oblivion,” (81-82) a state not unlike that of Helga Crane, the biracial protagonist of Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928). A once independent and irrepressible teacher fiercely seeking racial justice in the urban north, Helga eventually drifts into marriage and a life of poverty in rural Alabama, exiting the novel utterly lifeless upon giving birth to her fourth child. The narrator remarks, “And when, after that long frightfulness, the fourth little dab of amber humanity which Helga had contributed to a despised race was held before her for maternal approval, she failed entirely to respond properly to this sop of consolation for the suffering and horror through which she had passed” (127). Consistently underscoring the sense of horror surrounding the women’s pregnancies, these novels, as Berg remarks of *Weeds*, expose the ‘economic and social conditions under which motherhood remained a curse” (100).

Notably, the sense of horror surrounding the pregnancies of women characters lacking class privilege in novels by Dreiser and Norris significantly shape these narratives. Taking a closer look at the initial components of the narratives, it is important to note that each novel features a recognizable story of masculine development. Up until the event of the pregnancy, each of these novels exhibits features of the classic bildungsroman, a narrative that typically traces a (male) protagonist’s separation from his family, entry into the world of work and of “romantic conquest” (which typically entails involvement with two women), and final

accommodation to society (Jeffers 50-54). Deemed an emblem of the formation of masculine bourgeois subjectivity by some recent critics,<sup>95</sup> the traditional bildungsroman is, from this perspective, strongly concerned with the protagonist's internalization of the values of separation, autonomy, and self-determination, values central to liberal individualism that I discussed earlier in this project.<sup>96</sup> While seemingly incompatible with the demands of "accommodating to society," such values are ultimately affirmed in the bildungsroman, as Franco Moretti explains in observing that these narratives present the development of autonomy and the demand for social integration as "complementary and convergent trajectories, and at their point of encounter and equilibrium lies that full and double epiphany of meaning that is 'maturity'" (19).<sup>97</sup> In this way, these values are never seriously undermined; Moretti's account suggests that the bildungsroman protagonist internalizes a version of autonomy and self-determination that poses little challenge to the existing social order.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, these attitudes are so seamlessly incorporated by the central characters of these narratives that they come to define development as such, even for some early critics of the genre, as Grace Hovet points out. Critiquing traditional interpretations

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<sup>95</sup>Drawing on Franco Moretti's influential study of the bildungsroman, Sara Danius describes the classic form of the bildungsroman this way in her discussion of the relationship between the bildung theme in some modernist works and the epistemic crisis of vision in modernity (56).

<sup>96</sup>In this way, the novels' initial plot trajectories and features of the narrative also warrant obvious comparison with Horatio Alger narratives in which upward mobility proves the resulting reward for hard work, likewise emphasizing the autonomous, self-determining agent. That these novels constitute reworkings of the Alger theme, given their endings, has become a commonplace throughout criticism of *An American Tragedy*. See, for instance, Orlov's "Technique as Theme in *An American Tragedy*" and "Plot as Parody: Dreiser's Attack on the Alger Theme in *An American Tragedy*." See also "Lacking Brutish Conviction: Vandover's Tumble from the Leisure Class" for discussion of this theme with respect to Norris's work.

<sup>97</sup>Specifically, Moretti asks, "how can tendency towards individuality, which is the necessary fruit of a culture of self-determination, be made to coexist with the opposing tendency to normality, the offspring, equally inevitable, of the mechanism of socialization?" (16).

<sup>98</sup>Moretti reinforces this point that the meaning of such values becomes narrowly circumscribed so as not to threaten the social order by pointing out that in the bildungsroman "all tension between individual and his world; all desire for further metamorphosis is extinguished (23).

of the bildungsroman that equate the internalization of these values with an ostensibly timeless notion of psychological development, Hovet explains that for such critics the “protagonist’s successful entry into the adult community is seen to depend on his discovery or development of what Quinton Anderson has called an ‘imperial self’; the basic ingredients, according to these interpretations are separation, autonomy, competition, and reliance on an abstract system of rights” (17).<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, there is a certain irony to be appreciated in observing that the bildungsroman narrative with its emphasis on the protagonist’s building of a self based on separation or individuation, autonomy, and self-determination, is interrupted by the pregnant body whose very status can be said to challenge such a conception of personhood. A number of contemporary feminists have usefully articulated these features of pregnancy. Tess Cosslett explains, “Being pregnant, harbouring another inside the self, challenges our usual notions of identity and individuality: two people are in one body. Birth then further disrupts our categories as one ‘individual’ literally ‘divides’ into two” (*Women Writing Childbirth: Modern Discourses on Motherhood* 117-118). Similarly, Mary Poovey argues that “both pregnant women and fetuses challenge the notion of the humanist subject, pregnant women because they are not unitary, and fetuses because they are not self-determining” (qtd. in Epstein 128). Feminist analyses of reproduction, furthermore, have stressed the dangers of viewing the fetus as other than relational (as contemporary ways of framing abortion debates often have).<sup>100</sup> No doubt, male novelists

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<sup>99</sup>Connecting these observations beyond the domain of literature, Hovet notes, “Moreover, this pattern correlates with the theories of male psychologists such as Erik Erikson, William Perry, and Lawrence Kohlberg. Development, in their terms, involves the interplay of psychological and social forces, and positive psychological growth is measured in terms of the hero’s ability to separate self from the known, attain autonomy, assert rights, and then to become reintegrated into the social fabric” (19).

<sup>100</sup>Along this line, Susan Sherwin seeks to provide an alternative to what she names as nonfeminist supporters of abortion who focus their attention on the status of the fetus as an entirely separate entity or, even more

writing at the turn of the century may seem quite far removed from contemporary feminist discussions of pregnancy and issues related to reproductive freedom. However, in drawing on the pregnant body in their works, they deploy a potent symbol that, as these feminist theorists suggest, challenges prevailing notions of personhood associated with masculine development and the bildungsroman.<sup>101</sup> As the accounts of the bildungsroman trajectory make clear, a relational state between persons is exactly what processes of masculine development intend to overcome. Yet, as we will see, Dreiser and Norris curiously bring their male characters back to the state of continuity represented by maternal subjectivity.

In deploying the classic bildungsroman narrative early in their novels, Dreiser and Norris portray their protagonists' development of the "imperial self," as further discussion of the novels, I think, will confirm. At the same time as these novels emphasize the classic Bildung process in their initial narratives, the narratives themselves are constituted by a number of egregiously insensitive acts undertaken by the male protagonists, acts ranging from damaging neglect to

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problematically for her, anti-abortion arguments in which fetuses are identified as individuals within a culture which views the "(abstract) individual as sacred" and regards fetuses as "individuals to be honored and preserved" (106). On the tendency of Western legal and medical practices to treat fetuses as human subjects and pregnant women as "mere bodies," see also Bordo (71-97). Lauren Berlant additionally emphasizes and builds on feminist work that has identified the emergence of "fetality," a phenomenon that Berlant and others argue can be attributed to technologies and methods of representation like fetal imaging. Magnifying the fetus to a nearly superhuman scale that consequently serves to eclipse the mother's body, these developments have, as Berlant describes, contributed to a culture in which "the pregnant woman becomes the child to the fetus, becoming more minor and less politically represented than the fetus, which is in turn made more national, more central to securing the privileges of law, paternity, and other less institutional family strategies of contemporary American culture" (*The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* 85).

<sup>101</sup>There is another notable parallel to be found between this notion that the mother is subordinated to the unborn child in contemporary American culture and the framing of discourses concerning reproduction in the U.S. around the time of publication of the novels under discussion here during the early twentieth century. As cultural critics of this period have noted, a strong national interest in childbearing marks this era, from Teddy Roosevelt's infamous mandate for white, middle-class women to reproduce or else face the consequences of "national death, race death" (7428) to notions of racial uplift within African American communities that, as Berg has shown, worked to invest black women with a responsibility for racial advancement. As in the current climate described by Berlant and others, such emphasis on children as the future of a particular race would seem to readily encourage the subordination of women's interests to the interests of the child or the potential child, undercutting a more relational understanding of the fetus.

harmful domination of the bodies of others. That is, if these are initially narratives of development of the attitudes outlined above in the discussion of the bildungsroman, each narrative also turns on the protagonists' insensitive and violent acts. The protagonists' blatant exploitation of working-class women, in particular, is emphasized by their far different treatment of more well-to-do women in all three novels.<sup>102</sup> The working-class woman as a particularly vulnerable figure is a convention employed by Norris, Farrell, and especially Dreiser, whose rural-born Roberta Alden is left without familial protection.<sup>103</sup> As the novels bear out, cultural perceptions about working-class women at the time, specifically the notion of wage-earning work as "a female moral peril," contributed to working-women's vulnerability: "This suspicion of female laborers, whether immigrant or not, was in full flower in the nineteenth century's last decade. By rejecting the protection of the home they were exposing themselves to advances from coworkers and employers; though their chastity was deemed superior to men's, their inferior powers of judgment would thus place them at constant risk" (*Tales of the Working Girl* 9). Laura Hapke goes on to note that the "virtue betrayed" theme becomes a dominant one in literature about the experiences of working-class women of this time by both supporters and opponents of female laborers (*Tales of the Working Girl* 9).

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<sup>102</sup>It is important to remember, of course, that vulnerability based on class status exists on a continuum. Hapke argues, for instance, that in Dreiser's text, Roberta does enjoy race privilege ("No Green Card Needed: Dreiserian Narrative and Proletarian Female Whiteness" 137-39).

<sup>103</sup>Amal Amireh notes "The vulnerability of these women is underscored by their uncertain familial identities and by their severed ties to their rural past, a past that remains invisible" (33). Amireh further situates this figure within the broader context of turn-of-the century industrialization, positing, "Feminizing factory labor may have succeeded in upholding the myth of the agrarian republic by distancing the industrialization process from the men of America and therefore making it seem less threatening. At the same time, women as symbols of industrialization were seen as the weakest link of the new order because of the dominant gender ideology of the time, which viewed women as vulnerable, sexually and morally, outside their domestic sphere. Because of these contradictory implications of the 'factory girl,' this paradigm failed to alleviate the anxieties of America and was instead a source of unease and discomfort" (33).

Consider, then, how Roberta's struggles to resist Clyde's forceful advances early in their courtship compares with Clyde's ready submission to Sondra's refusal of his affection in *An American Tragedy*:

...suddenly he caught [Roberta's] face between his two hands and kissed her, before really she could evade him. Then having done this he held her while she resisted him, although it was almost impossible for her to do so. Instead she felt as though she wanted to put her arms around him or have him hold her tight, and this mood in regard to him and herself puzzled and troubled her. It was awful. What would people think—say—if they knew? (283)

While this passage indicates that a fear of social consequences, rather than an aversion to Clyde per se, largely motivates Roberta's reservations, her refusal of his advances throughout the scene is nevertheless made abundantly clear. Although she pleads with him to release her from his grasp, Clyde refuses, "not saying anything in reply—his pale face and dark hungry eyes held very close to hers" (283). Undeterred, he "kissed her again and again despite her protests, her little mouth and chin and cheeks, seeming too beautiful—too irresistible—then murmured pleadingly, for he was too overcome to speak vigorously" (283). Pressuring her into further intimacy, Clyde suggests that the two go to the house that Roberta rents and, in reply, Roberta "shook her head in opposition. The thought not only terrified but sickened her. Clyde was getting very bold to even suggest anything like that" (298). Sensing Roberta's "sudden revolt" only fuels Clyde's determination to regain control over her: "All the more was he flagellated by the desire for possession of that which now he half feared to be unobtainable"(299).

Sharply contrasting with the liberties Clyde takes with Roberta is his far meeker approach to Sondra later in the novel. When Sondra expresses an ambivalence similar to

Roberta's about contact with Clyde and subsequently rejects his advances, Clyde instantly yields to her wishes. This mirroring of Roberta's hesitations invites comparison between Clyde's treatment of the women, as the narrator remarks: ". . . [Sondra] lay for a moment willingly, joyously, in his arms, then suddenly sat up, the thought of what she was permitting him to do—kiss her in this way—and what it must mean to him, causing her on the instant to recover all her pose. 'I think you'd better go now,' she said definitely, yet not unkindly. 'Don't you?'" (380). In reply, Clyde shows concern for her feelings, as he "pleaded rather weakly, and yet submissively. 'Angry?'" (380). Underscoring his subservient demeanor the narrator further notes:

And she, in turn sensing his submissiveness, that of the slave for the master, and in part liking and in part resenting it, since like Roberta and Hortense, even she preferred to be master, shook her head negatively and a little sadly...And Clyde, realizing that for some reason he must not say more, had not the courage of persistence or the background to go further with her now, went for his coat and, looking sadly but obediently back at her, departed. (381)

Similarly, in *Vandover and the Brute*, Vandover's maltreatment of Ida, the working-class woman he impregnates, is similarly brought into focus by the presence of her upper-class counterpart, Turner Ravis. Ida's difference from Turner, a young woman from "one of the best families of the city," is clearly spelled out in such commentaries as "Vandover was not at all certain that he cared to be seen on Kearney Street as Ida Wade's escort; one never knew who one was going to meet. Ida was not a bad girl, she was not notorious, but, confound it, it would look queer. . . ." (49). Accompanying Turner to church during the day, he persuades Ida to join him at the Imperial, an irreputable hotel, at night. Presented through Vandover's recollections, the

threatening undertone of the episode surrounding the intimate encounter leading to Ida's pregnancy during their stay at the Imperial is even more pronounced than that of Clyde's efforts to pressure Roberta in *An American Tragedy*. Shortly following their trip to the Imperial, Vandover hears from a mutual friend report of a distressed Ida. As the possibility of her pregnancy begins to dawn on him, questions concerning her consent immediately arise: "What a calamity that would be! What a calamity! What a dreadful responsibility! What a crime! He could not keep the thought out of his mind. He tried to tell himself that Ida had practically given her consent by going into such a place; that he was not the only one, after all; that there was nothing certain as yet" (61). Any trace of the comforting thought that Ida's consent had been freely issued, however, vanishes as Vandover learns of her suicide, as the narrator explains:

Like the sudden unrolling of a great scroll he saw his responsibility for her death and for the ruin of that something in her which was more than life. What would become of her now? And what would become of him? For a single brief instant he tried to persuade himself that Ida had consented after all. But he knew that this was not so. She had consented, but he had forced her consent; he was nonetheless guilty. (70)<sup>104</sup>

As Clyde learns of Roberta's pregnancy in Dreiser's novel, attitudes associated with the classic bildungsroman—a marked presumption of one's separateness from others and privileging of autonomy and self-determination—figure strongly into his increasingly insensitive and harmful thoughts and actions. Once her pregnancy is confirmed, the novel focuses on Clyde's

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<sup>104</sup>In his argument that Vandover employs categories of intention and responsibility to judge his actions--categories that he argues the novel undermines--Lee Clark Mitchell asserts that in assuming full responsibility for Ida's death "Vandover responds too melodramatically to effects that can only be known in retrospect" (*Determined Fictions* 399). Perhaps this is so and I do not mean to assign a causal relationship between Vandover's actions and Ida's death; I only mean to point out here the extent to which the novel leaves little mystery concerning the nature of Vandover's treatment of Ida.



urges to separate, or “extract,” himself from his connections to Roberta. Failing to obtain an abortifacient from the druggist, Clyde, as the narrator notes, felt “that he must now, and speedily, extract himself as gracefully and unirritatingly as possible from his intimacy with Roberta” (387-88). As he meditates on his plans to carry out the “accident” that would end Roberta’s life, Clyde muses, “That would be the end, then, wouldn’t it, of all his troubles in connection with Roberta? . . . A noiseless, pathless, quarrelless solution of all his present difficulties, and only joy before him forever. Just an accidental, unpremeditated drowning—and then the glorious future which would be his!” (458).<sup>105</sup> In her analysis of the male initiation stories, Grace Hovet points out that metaphors related to the sense of vision often work to reinforce traditional bildungsroman values and downplay one’s sense of connection or responsibility towards others. More specifically, she explains that visual metaphors, with their stress on “quest and sight,” tend to govern the male developmental story (20) and limit the necessity for relationships and community with others.<sup>106</sup> Hovet’s insight on this point is useful and I shall return later in the chapter to examining the ways in which *An American Tragedy*’s depictions of non-visual perceptions suggest alternative resources for conceiving of one’s relationships to others. For now, though, it is notable that Clyde’s vision of Sondra and her “high social world” virtually obliterates Roberta from his sphere of concern: “And that he did care for [Roberta] (yes, he did),

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<sup>105</sup>The emphasis on extrication here also notably recurs in Dreiser’s depiction of the doctor’s stance toward Roberta when she appeals to him for an abortion. The narrator remarks, “he seemed to be snatching at a plausible excuse for extricating himself from a case which promised little other than danger and difficulty” (409). Interestingly, though the doctor purportedly objects to the destruction of “human life” that an abortion would entail, we further learn “he had assisted in extricating from the consequences of their folly several young girls of good family who had fallen from grace and could not otherwise be rescued, still he was opposed to aiding, either by his own countenance or skill, any lapse or tangles not heavily sponsored by others” (416). These moments point toward pervasive self-interested attitudes on the part of men that further contribute to the vulnerability of women unprotected by class privilege.

<sup>106</sup>Drawing examples from literature and popular culture, Hovet notes, “Thus it is his vision of being a successful salesman that drives Willy Loman along New England highways, and it is their vision of utopia that cycles the ‘Easy Riders’ in the 1969 film of that name on their way to New Orleans” (20).

although now—basking in the direct rays of this newer luminary—he could scarcely see Roberta any longer, so strong were the actinic rays of this other” (327). The vision of freely pursuing his future with Sondra infiltrates Clyde’s thoughts to such extent that he perceives any threat to it as unbearable:

And so disturbed was he by the panorama of the bright world of which Sondra was the center and which was now at stake, that he could scarcely think clearly. Should he lose all this for such a world as he and Roberta could provide for themselves—a small home—a baby, such a routine work-a-day life as taking care of her and a baby on such a salary as he could earn, and from which most likely he would never again be freed! God! A sense of nausea seized him. (431)

Of course, Clyde’s efforts to sever connections to Roberta in the interest of securing greater control over his future and fulfilling his “vision” of success eventually escalate to his contemplation and plotting of her death, epitomizing her ultimate disposability for him.

Norris’s text implies a connection between Vandover’s treatment of Ida and his developing self-conception. One of the main emphases of the novel from its very beginning, of course, is Vandover’s struggle between his “better” side and “the brute,” or his baser side. His better side constitutes a rational seat of control and site of self-determination.<sup>107</sup> The brute, on the other hand, is roughly equivalent to his body and its desires for sleep, food, and sex. In the following passage, Vandover ponders this conflict, significantly aligning Turner Ravis with his better side and Ida (through his reference to the Imperial hotel) as well as Flossie, a prostitute with even less class-privilege, with the brute:

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<sup>107</sup> As this side is also associated with Vandover’s ability to produce artwork in the novel, its alignment with a notion of culture, as opposed to the nature of his “brute” body is also evident.

The little picture of Turner Ravis that hung over his mantelpiece caught his glance, looking out at him with her honest eyes and sweet smile...All that was best in him went out toward her in a wave of immense tenderness; the tears came to his eyes, he could not tell why. Ah, he was not good enough for her now, but he would love her so well that he would grow better, and between her and his good father and his art, the better Vandover, the real Vandover, would grow so large and strong within him that there should be no room for the other Vandover, the Vandover of Flossie and of the Imperial, the Vandover of the brute. (77)

Important here is the notion that the so-called better Vandover is the “the real Vandover,” indicating that Vandover sees himself as *not really* his body. The idea of a higher self is notably reinforced by the passage’s references to the vision of Turner. Forging a more explicit conceptual linking of Flossie to his body, the narrator remarks, “Turner Ravis influenced him upon his best side, calling out in him all that was cleanest, finest, and most delicate. Flossie appealed only to the animal and the beast in him, the evil, hideous brute that made instant answer” (33). For Vandover, women such as Ida and Flossie are bodies; he is not actually the “evil beast” of his body. Here again it is useful to consider the ambiguity of free indirect discourse in interpreting such characterizations of Vandover’s body. We need not suppose that the narrator simply ascribes this “evil” quality to the body as critics often presume and as such conclude that the text, in classic naturalist fashion, demonstrates that persons are inevitably victims of biological drives that result in harmful actions. Instead, the text can be understood as depicting Vandover’s own questionable perception of his body’s iniquity. Refusing to identify himself with his body, Vandover, not surprisingly then, demonstrates a marked lack of regard for other bodies, or what I have earlier in this project referred to as corporeal continuity, as indicated

by his damaging treatment of Ida. The stance that one is fundamentally not one's body seems to readily support the physical domination of others, especially those others perceived as bodies.

As it turns out, however, Vandover fails to avoid identification with his body, as his awareness of the brute's presence steadily intensifies with the novel's progression. Moreover, as I suggested earlier, the brute's inhabitation of Vandover begins to distinctly resemble a pregnancy, and a terror-filled one at that. Vandover's "symptoms" intensify after Ida's suicide, as he is variously seized by nausea and fits of overeating. Stirrings of the brute overtake him and the brute, described as a "creature that lived in his flesh" (200) is additionally characterized as "huge, strong, insatiable, swollen and distorted out of all size, grown to be a monster, glutton yet still ravenous, some fearful bestial satyr, groveling, perverse, horrible beyond words" (144). Gesturing toward the terror incited by an unwanted pregnancy:

...he had suddenly felt the presence of the brute, had heard its loathsome muttering growl, had at last seen it far down at the end of a passage, dimly and in a dark shadow; terrified, he had started back, looking wildly about for any avenue of escape...There was nothing, nothing. He clearly saw the fate toward which he was hurrying; it was not too late to save himself if he only could find help, but he could find no help. His terror increased almost to hysteria. (146)

We might imagine that Vandover's acute sense of an absence of help or response from another here coincides with Ida's. The text's reference to hysteria is repeated elsewhere during another uprising of the brute: "For a moment Vandover felt as though he was losing his hold upon his reason; the return of the hysteria shook him like a dry, light leaf. He suddenly had a sensation that the room was too small to hold him" (153). This language of hysteria is relevant not only because it invokes the notion of a "hysterical pregnancy," but also for its association with

trauma. In her study of British gothic literature in Britain, Kelly Hurley explains, “To assert that something is too horrible to be spoken of is the privileged utterance of the Gothic, but it is also the privileged utterance of the hysteric. . . That which the conscious mind cannot acknowledge, and the subject cannot speak, the body tells instead. . .” (48). Remarking on other physical sensations mimicking pregnancy, the narrator notes, “All at once he felt a peculiar sensation in [his hands]: they seemed to swell, the fingers puffing to an enormous size, the palms bulging, the whole member from the wrist to the nails distended like a glove when one has blown into it to straighten it out. Then he had a feeling that his head was swelling in the same way” (161).

Clare Hanson’s account of nineteenth-century discourses on pregnancy echo the novel’s depictions of physical sensations and point to mental disturbances that are also relevant to reading Vandover’s character. Referring to one such writing, Hanson points out, “Douglas Fox, in *Signs, Disorders and Management of Pregnancy...Written Expressly for the Use of Females*, noted that on the establishment of pregnancy ‘innumerable sympathies arise throughout the system, producing not only extraordinary bodily sensations, as pains in the head, in the teeth, in the extremities, and in other parts, but often giving rise to the most singular mental irritations manifested by anxiety and despondency” (61). Hanson emphasizes the emergence of the disease category within early nineteenth-century obstetric textbooks of the “insanity of pregnancy” which she describes as a little-known phenomenon among historians of medicine and culture (60). According to early writings on obstetrics by accouchers (male midwives), notes Hanson, pregnancy can produce “states of despondency bordering on insanity” and that “women are more or less liable to dejection of spirits, hysteric affections, and sometimes to actual fainting” (24). Critics of *Vandover and the Brute* have generally not remarked on the link between Ida’s pregnancy and Vandover’s possession by “the brute,” taking for granted that Vandover’s

usurpation by “the brute” and ensuing “insanity” denote evidence of syphilis owing to his brothel visits (though this reading is not unanimous since other critics have described him as suffering from “lycanthropy,” a rare disease in which a person becomes a wolf).<sup>108</sup> We will recall, however, that the text’s recounting of a rather formative moment in Vandover’s childhood finds him poring over an article on obstetrics in his father’s encyclopedia: “All at once he came upon the long article ‘Obstetrics,’ profusely illustrated with old-fashioned plates and steel engravings. He read it from beginning to end. It was the end of all his childish ideals, the destruction of all his first illusions” (6-7). Strongly impressed by “knowledge” of pregnancy that may well have been derived from the nineteenth-century discourses to which Hanson refers, Vandover eventually exhibits symptoms that might be better connected to the “insanity” of pregnancy rather than that of either syphilis or lycanthropy. This distinction becomes significant to the extent that it casts the infamous dog-imitating episodes differently than naturalist readings that emphasize Vandover’s “degeneration.” Vandover repeatedly expresses the fear that he is going insane (161, 180) and the text relates the first of several incidents in which he imitates the behavior of a dog: “Vandover was sitting bolt upright in his chair, his hands gripping the table, his eyes staring straight before him. He was barking incessantly. It was evident that now he could not stop himself; it was like hysterical laughter, a thing beyond his control” (196).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>One important exception to this general neglect of the theme of pregnancy on the part of critics in discussing *Vandover and the Brute* is Seltzer’s brief discussion of the novel. Though he does not make any connection between Ida’s pregnancy and Vandover’s situation, he does remark that Vandover’s physical symptoms denote “a strikingly perverse case in obstetrics” (36) which he reads within the context of his larger project of examining what he calls the linked forces of production and reproduction in naturalist texts.

<sup>109</sup>The connection to animality is notable with respect to my analysis of animality as suggesting a greater corporeal sensitivity in London’s texts. In another more detailed depiction of Vandover’s behavior, the narrator notes: “Suddenly and without the slightest warning Vandover’s hands came slowly above his head and he dropped forward, landing upon his palms. All in an instant he had given way, yielding in a second to the strange hallucination of that four-footed thing that sulked and snarled. Now without a moment’s stop he ran back and forth along the wall of the room, upon the palms of his hands and his toes, a ludicrous figure, like that of certain clowns one sees at the circus, contortionists walking about the sawdust, imitating some kind of enormous dog” (202)

Further suggestive of Vandover's "pregnancy" are fits of artistic production during periods when the brute's presence is prominent, given the connection often posited between pregnancy and stimulation of imaginative faculties, epitomized in the popular eighteenth-century theory of maternal impressions.<sup>110</sup> Pregnancy's association with creativity is also reinforced in literary texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On a figurative level, Walt Whitman's characterizations of creativity in "Song of Myself" (1855) are strongly imbued with birth imagery. Adopting a rather technical language of pregnancy, Whitman's speaker chants "a new chant of dilation" (18) and further declares that he will deliver his "song of procreation" without "the obstetric forceps of the surgeon" (26).<sup>111</sup> More literal associations of pregnancy with creativity surface also in D. H. Lawrence's 1915 novel *The Rainbow* which, in Hanson's estimation, renders pregnancy "a form of creativity from which men are excluded" (108). In something of an inversion of this link between pregnancy and creativity, Vandover's condition disturbs and distorts the art he attempts to produce. Describing his painting, the narrator remarks, "The lines on his canvas were those of a child just learning to draw; one saw for what they were intended, but they were crude, they had no life, no meaning. The very thing that would have made them intelligible, interpretive, that would have made them art, was absent. . . suddenly a great fear came upon him, a momentary return of that wild hysterical terror from which he believed he had forever escaped" (150). Reinforcing the terror accompanying Vandover's creative attempts, the narrator further notes, "Grotesque and meaningless shapes, the

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<sup>110</sup>The notion that the maternal impressions, or imaginings of pregnant women could be so powerful as to affect the fetus, as Julia Epstein points out, can be traced even further back to Hindu medical texts predating Western medicine (119).

<sup>111</sup>Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb and Julie Tharp also cite these verses in the context of discussing "The Language of the Brag," a contemporary poem by Sharon Olds on the subject of childbearing experiences which features a direct address to Whitman (2).

mocking caricatures of those he saw in his fancy, grew under his charcoal, while slowly, a queer, numb feeling came in his head, like a rising fog, and the touch of that unreasoning terror returned, this time stronger, more persistent, more tenacious than before” (150).

Vandover thus demonstrates strong signs of what we might more commonly deem a “sympathetic pregnancy,” especially judging by nineteenth-century conceptions of parturition. Male internalization of pregnant experience arises elsewhere in literature of the early twentieth century, perhaps most notably in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922). Erin Soros offers an analysis of Joyce’s portrayal of Leopold Bloom’s deeply empathetic responses to female experiences: “Bloom’s empathy for women’s experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, labor, and still-birth does not reflect a static contemplation of an other: it performs an internalization of these experiences until they become Bloom’s own: ‘near her monthlies, I expect, makes them feel ticklish. I have such a bad headache today,’ says Bloom, repeating in himself the symptom he describes in the other” (8).<sup>112</sup> Regarding pregnancy specifically, Soros further notes that, “[Bloom’s] capacity to internalize the other—the other as mother—culminates in the ability to give birth. He announces ‘O, I so want to be a mother’ just as his fantasy is realized and he bears eight sons. He is full of the special bloom of motherfatherhood...Bloom: to swell. As with a pregnant belly” (8). Vandover’s character, as I have been suggesting, exhibits a similar internalization of pregnancy that is different from statically contemplating an other. At the same

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<sup>112</sup>Soros elaborates:

When [Bloom] speaks ‘the language of flow’ he has more fully internalized the process: ‘Devils they are when that’s coming on them. Dark devilish appearance. Molly often told me feel things a ton weight...Feel it myself too’. Finally he completely incorporates the experience, complaining about his own ‘monthly.’ Bloom, alias Henry Flower, is in his flowers: ‘Bit light in the head. Monthly or effect of the other.’ The effect of the other is to perform Bloom as a woman, ‘the new womanly man,’ ‘bisexually abnormal,’ ‘masculine feminine passive active.’ He is a flower, a plant with both male and female reproductive organs. He is Virag, ‘virgo intacta,’ a con man, a man with a cunt” (7).



time, the text's emphasis on the horror of Vandover's "pregnancy" indicates that it is not simply a universal experience of pregnancy that he assimilates, but one particularly resonant with Ida's experience as a woman unprotected by class privilege. Continuing to underscore the sense of terror surrounding his experience, the narrator notes, "Vandover was in torment, overcome now by that same fear with which he had at last become so familiar, the unreasoning terror of something unknown. He uttered an exclamation, a suppressed cry of despair, of misery. . . ." (201).

In this way, then, Norris invests Vandover with an acute sensitivity, or "feel" for what Ida might likely have experienced whereas previously his character had acted with such oblivion of and disregard for her body, as the text makes a point of. Through Norris's dramatization, Vandover is literally made corporeally continuous with her. Before considering more closely the significance of this turn of events in Norris's novel, I want to point out the striking resemblances between Clyde's and Roberta's experiences that we similarly find in *An American Tragedy*. Despite the pattern of insensitive actions that I described earlier, Dreiser plants indications throughout the novel revealing Clyde's capacity to be open to and affected by his encounter with the body of another. Consider the following scene before Roberta's pregnancy, for instance, in which she expresses her frustration at her privation in relation to Sondra and the upper-class world she senses that Clyde wishes to abandon her for:

And to his astonishment and dismay even, at this point her voice grew suddenly vibrant and then broke, as on a sob. And as he could both see and feel, she was deeply hurt—terribly and painfully hurt—heart sore and jealous; and at once, although his first impulse was to grow angry and defiant again, his mood as

suddenly softened...He could for some reason almost see himself in Roberta's place. (374)

The narrator continues, "Her voice shook, and she ceased talking, her eyes filling and her lips beginning to quiver. And as swiftly she concealed her face with her hands and turned away, her shoulders shaking as she did so. Indeed her body was now torn for the moment by the most desperate and convulsive sobs, so much so that Clyde, perplexed and astonished and deeply moved by this sudden display of a pent-up and powerful emotion, as suddenly was himself moved deeply" (374).<sup>113</sup>

Yet this sense of connection proves short-lived as Clyde's "visions" of Sondra's world continues to govern his actions, which lead finally to Roberta's death. In light of the observations cited above, it is noteworthy that the much-discussed crucial moment of the text (and Clyde's ultimate attempt at "extraction" from the situation) involves an explicit rejection of somatic connection: "And then, as she drew near him, seeking to take his hand in hers and the camera from him in order to put it in the boat, he flinging out at her, but not even then with any intention to do other than free himself of her—her touch—her pleading—consoling sympathy—her presence forever—God!" (515). From a phenomenological point of view, the stress on touch here is especially significant. As Iris Young notes of the reciprocity adhering in touch, "Unlike the gazer, the toucher cannot be at a distance from what she knows in touch. While active, touch

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<sup>113</sup>These affective displays and exchanges occur elsewhere in *An American Tragedy* and at times seem to approach a kind of telepathy between characters. Remarking that although Clyde is utterly enamored of Sondra "he could not fail instinctively to feel some of the thoughts that employed [Roberta's] mind—such dark, sad, despairing thoughts. And these seized upon him at times as definitely and poignantly as though they were voices of accusation or complaint..." (381). Likewise, during the scene in which Roberta appeals to the physician for assistance, the physician is described as feeling that "[Roberta's] own thought waves [were] attacking his cerebral receptive centers" (415). Critics have noted these somewhat "mystical" qualities of Dreiser's fiction, usually in the context of pointing out the notorious inconsistencies of his writing. In analyzing Dreiser's style, for instance, Paul Giles observes that an "enigmatic dualism permeates the entire corpus of Dreiser's writings" wherein "tough-minded realism is combined with mysticism and metaphysical 'shadows'" (52).

is simultaneously passive. The gazer can see without being seen, and as Foucault has pointed out, this possibility is a major source of modern disciplinary powers. But the toucher cannot touch the happenings she knows without also being touched by them” (193). Holding a similarly reciprocal quality, as I have discussed in an earlier chapter, is the sound of Roberta’s cries. Like the cries of women that linger long after Martin’s encounter with them in London’s *Martin Eden*, Roberta’s cries also manage to penetrate Clyde, forming the final “image” of the scene of Roberta’s drowning: “And then Clyde, with the sounds of Roberta’s cries still in his ears, that last frantic, white appealing look in her eyes, swimming heavily, gloomily and darkly to shore” (515).<sup>114</sup>

While Clyde might attempt to eschew the somatic connections that the text details, Dreiser ultimately does not allow Clyde to escape a deep sense of connection to the terror Roberta faces during the ordeal of her pregnancy. As in *Vandover and the Brute*, Dreiser’s depiction of the terror Clyde experiences during his trial and imprisonment can be seen as continuous with, and may perhaps be described as an amplification of, the horror and despair associated with Roberta’s unwanted pregnancy earlier in the novel. *An American Tragedy*, too, presents striking parallels between Roberta’s experience of pregnancy earlier in the novel and Clyde’s time in prison. Characterizing Roberta’s distress upon learning of her pregnancy, the narrator notes, “. . . she was compelled, to her dismay and terror, to enter the factory one morning, just about this time, her face a symbol of even graver and more terrifying doubts and fears than any that had hitherto assailed her. For now, in addition to her own troubled conclusions in regard to Clyde, there had sprung up over night the dark and constraining fear that

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<sup>114</sup>Clare Eby reads Roberta as one of the more “powerful” of Dreiser’s female characters since her presence exerts so much influence over Clyde who, according to Eby, “responds to his own limited agency by terminating hers” (156).

even this might not now be possible, for the present at least...she now, at a time when it was most inimical for both, found herself pregnant” (383). Echoing this description, the narrator remarks with regard to Clyde, “The obvious terror and depression—constant and unshakable of those who, in spite of all their courage or their fears, their bravado or their real indifference (there were even those) were still compelled to think and wait” (807). Additional parallels include commonalities in the ways in which both Roberta and Clyde suffer extended and intense isolation and “waiting” in their respective situations. As the text relates, Clyde’s countenance preceding his death even recalls the language of the description of Roberta cited earlier: “Clyde’s eyes! That look as he sank limply into that terrible chair, his eyes fixed nervously and, as he thought, appealingly and dazedly upon him and the group surrounding him” (853).<sup>115</sup>

James T. Farrell’s *Studs Lonighan* (1934) offers another narrative of masculine development interrupted by pregnancy. Often cited as a later, Depression-era “classic” instance of literary naturalism like the novels of Dreiser and Norris under discussion here, *Studs Lonighan* is a trilogy that relates the story of Bill “Studs” Lonigan, the son of working-class Irish immigrants in Chicago. Following Studs from his early days in grammar school through his “young manhood,” and finally to his eventual demise, the novel emphasizes both Studs’s on going desires to become a conventional hero of sorts (a number of his fantasies feature Studs as a military or business leader) and to secure the love of Lucy, a comfortably middle-class woman whom he has known and idealized since his early youth. Just as he begins to achieve modest success in these areas, though, his working-class girlfriend Catherine becomes pregnant and the

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<sup>115</sup>Picking up on some of these themes, Leonard Cassuto has argued that *An American Tragedy* demonstrates how the conflict between self-sacrifice or sympathy for others on the one hand and self-interest on the other can result in crime (201). As I have been arguing, though, I do think that the text shows a stronger preoccupation with undercutting the tendency towards self-interest by, for example, undermining the bildung narrative and by emphasizing corporeal continuity at this crucial point of the lake scene.

strain of the situation is variously characterized as the major factor contributing to Studs's death. In Farrell's text, Studs Lonigan joyously embraces the prospect of his autonomy in expressing a marked feeling of relief after calling off his engagement to Catherine: "He felt a sudden sense of freedom, and realized now that after becoming engaged to Catherine, he had thought of her in almost everything he had done or planned to do. He'd had to consider not only himself but also Catherine in his ideas about the future, and that had been a change he hadn't even noticed in himself. And now he was free to think only of himself, and not of how she'd fit into the picture" (653). However, this sensation proves fleeting as their engagement resumes and Catherine becomes pregnant. In the scene that precipitates Studs's long deathbed scene, Catherine and Studs go to the beach where he entertains more thoughts of extracting himself from the situation and even, as one critic has suggested, attempts to induce a miscarriage by encouraging Catherine to exercise vigorously. When Studs ends up fainting in the water, though, the scene comes to a grinding halt and we are left uncertain of his intentions.

In the trilogy's final installment which immediately follows that incident, Farrell alternates between scenes depicting Studs and Catherine in their harrowing situations; the interspersed scenes notably highlight the characters' common experience of pain, misery, fear, and loss of control over the body. Referring to Studs, the narrator describes, "His head sagged. He was aware of an enveloping blackness and colors, colors that seemed sick and mysterious, orange streaks, green and scarlet bands, purple lines, wheels and rainbows of colors hot like firecrackers and skyrocketed, scarred all this blackness. He knew now what it was. He was dying, and he felt fear, like a great puke, sweep through him" (801). Closely mirroring this depiction is the terror and uncertainty about the future evoked by the portrayal of Catherine's experience, for it is at this point that Studs's mother (who surmises Catherine's pregnancy)

accuses Catherine of being responsible for Studs's death and informs her that their family will not extend any support to her. In an unmistakable parallel to Studs's earlier reaction, Catherine's extreme distress causes her to faint (817-819).

Reversing the quintessential bildungsroman trajectory that ends in the achievement of an autonomous, self-determined protagonist, these novels conclude with dramatizations of corporeally intersecting male protagonists and female characters. No doubt, the experiences the men undergo are depicted as agonizing. Rather than simply portraying corporeal continuity as the pernicious source of the men's demise, though, I would argue that the novels invest the protagonists with a sense of the women's terror in response to those men's previous demonstrations of insensitivity towards the women's bodies. In this way, the novels reject a cultural scripting wherein women are envisioned as being solely responsible for or even capable of continuity with others while men's more powerful need for autonomy is privileged. Along this line, feminists have offered relevant analyses of some central differences in the psychosocial development of men and women. Drawing on Georges Bataille's suggestion that the self experienced as continuous with others is tantamount to death,<sup>116</sup> Nancy Hartsock points out:

Beneath Bataille's theorization of continuity as death lies the conflictual individuation of the boy: Continuity with another, continuity with the mother, carries not just danger but inevitable death as a separate being. But this complete dismissal of the experience of another bespeaks a profound lack of empathy and refusal to recognize the very being of another. It manifests the chasm that

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<sup>116</sup>In the original text, Bataille states, "It is my intention to suggest that for us, discontinuous beings that we are, death means continuity of being" (13). It should be noted that Bataille's broader concern is to show how eroticism betrays a strong preoccupation with seeking this lost continuity, as he stresses, "My aim is to show that with all of them [physical, emotional, and religious eroticism] the concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" (15).

separates each man from every other being and from the natural world, the chasm that marks and defines the problem of community. (302)<sup>117</sup>

Resonating with the masculine self-conception proffered by the classic bildungsroman, processes of individuation in boys, “the masculine sense of self as separate, distinct, and even disconnected [from the world],” according to Hartsock and others, issues from an imperative to separate oneself from unity with the mother’s body through the erection of distinct ego boundaries” (Hartsock 299). The oft-cited psychoanalytic notion of abjection is also relevant here. Citing Julia Kristeva’s articulation of the concept, Hurley highlights abjection’s origin in pregnancy and birth “Abjection begins when this proto-subject, very tentatively, begins to clear out a space on which the ego will be constructed and from which an “I” will emerge. The moment is a terrifying one, recalling the trauma of birth, “the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be” (43). Moreover, the understanding of abjection as a “fundamentally ambivalent affective state,” as Hurley deems it, intimates that the prospect of corporeal continuity is not an altogether aversive one: “the subject confronting the object is torn between two ontological possibilities: one which is rigidly invested in the construct of a stable self-identity, one which is attracted to the turbulence, chaos, and indifferenciation associated with pre-Oedipality” (Hurley 44).

Lying at the core of masculine selfhood is a tendency toward abstraction, defined against the concreteness of daily life. As Hartsock explains, given the mandate for separation from concrete connection to the mother, males are encouraged to “identify with an abstract,

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<sup>117</sup>I find Hartsock’s account of these observations insightful because, working from a materialist feminist perspective, she emphasizes that this state of affairs grows out of a distinct set of social relations, specifically the sexual division of labor in parenting.

cultural stereotype and learn abstract behaviors not attached to a well-known person” and, as such, “masculinity becomes an abstract ideal to be achieved over the opposition of daily life” (298-99).<sup>118</sup> Since the body is part of the concrete domain of daily life, within this masculinist notion of selfhood, “The body is both irrelevant and in opposition to the (real) self, an impediment to be overcome by the mind. . .” (Hartsock 300).

The novels disrupt rather than affirm this cultural division of labor by dramatically curtailing the development of attitudes that seem to underlie the insensitive treatment of other bodies. We will recall, for instance, that the masculinist conception of self outlined above is precisely evinced by Vandover. As I have tried to show, however, the belief that one can easily escape identification with the body is not an attitude validated by the events that unfold in the novel. Moreover, when Vandover is brought to bodily awareness, or somatic attentiveness, what also surfaces is a sense of profound continuity with another body. In this sense, the text indicts abstract masculinity, or the notion that the self ought to primarily be defined over and against concrete relations with other bodies. Dreiser and Norris significantly refuse to affirm their characters’ attempts to distance themselves from the suffering of others via traditional *bildung*, or masculinist attitudes and instead dramatically invest them with a trace of another’s experience.

Of course, because of their eventual exclusion from society, we cannot know if the male protagonists of these novels would, in fact, act with more sensitivity towards others in light of their newly “hypersensitive bodies.” This exclusion suggests an impasse or difficulty about how to represent the ongoing effects of their transformations. However, the fact that these

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<sup>118</sup>In this way, abstract masculinity also corresponds to traditional demarcations of domestic and public spheres. As Hartsock explains, “Material reality as experienced by the boy in the family provides no model, and is unimportant in the attainment of masculinity. Nothing of value to the boy occurs within the family, and masculinity becomes an abstract ideal to be achieved over the opposition of daily life. Masculinity must be attained by means of opposition to the concrete world of daily life, by escaping from contact with the female world of the household into the masculine world of politics or public life” (299).



demonstrations are not realized within the space of the text does not diminish the profundity of the shift in self-conception or stance toward others that the novels do gesture toward. Given the ways in which traces of the women's experiences uncannily resurface in the latter portion of the narratives, these novels, furthermore, become less about the fates of the individual men than they do about keeping in view the consequences of insensitivity towards other bodies. In this way, it is notably the women's experience that the novels refuse to "repress" despite their protagonists' efforts to do so.

Given the undeniably somber tone and outcomes of these novels, it is tempting to read them, as scores of critics have done, in terms of human decline, whether it is a decline due to natural-biological or social factors. That is, it may seem spurious to read these novels as sanguine affirmations of persons' capacities for connection with and sensitivity towards others. However, it is instructive here to consider Richard Sennett's characterization of connection as sometimes involving a "harshness" and an element of self-work as well as his conceptualization of sympathy as entailing a loss of the power of self-definition. Sennett describes "a harsher connection made out of arousal by the Other, made by feeling the presence of those who are different. In order to sense the Other, one must do the work of accepting oneself as incomplete. The meaning of 'sympathy' for us is about something other than friendliness or, as [Hannah] Arendt thought, pity. Instead sympathy is a condition of mutual concern aroused as one loses the power of self-definition" (148).<sup>119</sup>

As the novels gesture towards, acknowledging one's embodiment might encourage a more profound sensitivity to and regard for the experiences of other bodies. Writers long-associated with little more than popular quasi-philosophies of their day, Dreiser and Norris

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<sup>119</sup>Notably, Sennett contrasts this version of selfhood with the "ideal of *Bildung*" in which "the life of an individual became psychologically complete through the same acts that integrated the individual into society" (148).

provide through their fictions insights more strongly in line with contemporary corporeal epistemologies important to ethics. *An American Tragedy* and *Vandover and the Brute* suggest in this way that fuller inhabitation of the body might provide a stronger basis for social relations, enabling the “carnal community” proposed by recent readings of Merleau-Ponty that I described in depth in Chapter 1. Like London’s *Martin Eden*, Dreiser’s text especially highlights through its depictions of non-visual perception the ways in which the body’s permeability to the outside world via the senses significantly allows for the incorporation of a trace of another’s bodily experience into one’s own experience. As the phenomenological theories I discussed previously also have pointed out, claiming one’s own embodiment makes less likely the possibility that one will simply project the condition of embodiment onto another (usually “different” other), as Vandover does in originally aligning Ida with the body and thus demonstrating no sense of continuity with her.

In a related vein, Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* has emphasized the ethical possibilities in recognizing one’s own “otherness” to oneself. For Kristeva it is the unconscious that undercuts one’s claims to full self knowledge and self determination and thus makes one a “stranger” to oneself. Claiming the otherness of one’s own embodiment<sup>120</sup> would nevertheless seem to serve a similar function that claiming the otherness of one’s psyche does in this conception (and here Schwartz’s poem in the epigraph of this chapter, figuring the body as a heavy bear who is “opaque” and “unknown,” provides an apt illustration of the body-as-stranger). As Oliver notes in her reading of Kristeva’s text, “In this way, the violence directed

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<sup>120</sup>Interestingly, in fact, Kristeva describes the maternal body, in accordance with the feminist accounts of pregnancy I described earlier, as “the most powerful model of alterity-within because it exists at the heart of the social and the species. The maternal body is the very embodiment of alterity-within. It cannot be neatly divided into subject and object. ‘It is an identity,’ says Kristeva, ‘that splits, turns in on itself and changes without becoming other’” (Oliver 4).

toward the other can be disintegrated ‘in its very nucleus.’ The subject can understand the other, sympathize with the other, and moreover, take the place of the other, because the subject is other” (13).<sup>121</sup> To be inhabited by otherness, in other words, undermines the tendency towards insensitivity and violence against others. Kelly Oliver describes Kristeva’s model of “outlaw ethics” as an “alternative to juridical models of ethics where autonomous subjects relate to each other through force of law” (18) and notes that in this view “the subject-in-process is not bound to its other through external restrictions” (19). If “Kristeva’s strategy is to make the social relation interior to the psyche” (Oliver 14), might it be that corporeally-minded theorists and authors have sought to make the social relation interior to the body?

The portrayal of Clyde as effectively “penetrated” by Roberta’s presence via his senses during the crucial drowning scene takes on special significance in this light vis-à-vis the question of Clyde’s responsibility for Roberta’s drowning that has remained a point of controversy for readers since the novel’s inception. Shortly following the publication of *An American Tragedy*, in fact, Dreiser’s publishers sponsored an essay contest asking readers to explain whether they thought Clyde was responsible for Roberta’s death. As Ann Algeo explains, the contest’s winner, a lawyer and law professor, argued that Clyde had no legal obligation to rescue Roberta and therefore was not guilty of her death (36-37). Yet, the novel’s rendering of Clyde’s corporeal connection to Roberta in this pivotal scene that I detailed earlier suggest that Dreiser’s interest may be to locate persons’ sense of relation to one another not through force of law, but

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<sup>121</sup>As in the case of corporeally-centered phenomenological theories, this is not to be confused with a simple colonization of the other’s experience. Oliver further notes, “As Kristeva is quick to point out, this does not mean that subject and other share their strangeness, their otherness. That is it say, they are not the same in their strangeness. Rather, the subject can relate to an other as other because she is an other to herself” (13). Resonating with Kristeva’s conception of the self as stranger to itself is Sennett’s remark that, “A man or woman can become in the course of a lifetime like a foreigner to him or herself, by doing things or entering into feelings that do not fit the familiar framework of identity, the seemingly social fixities of race, class, age, gender, or ethnicity. . . Something unanticipated remains unexplained and unresolved within; one accepts the permanent puzzle and turns outward” (148).

within the bodies of persons themselves. *An American Tragedy* focuses on sensory experience as providing opportunity for incorporating a meaningful regard for another's bodily experience or suffering into one's own experience. Similarly, perhaps Vandover and Norris's McTeague or Jack London's Wolf Larsen<sup>122</sup> are not the ethical cesspools that much naturalist criticism would have us believe, characters who have become nearly synonymous with their biological drives and thus destined, or determined to act in self-interested, "instinctive" ways. The conception of the body presumed to be operating in these texts, of course, poses an obstacle to meaningful community with others, preserving a Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest ethos for which these texts have become infamous. Rather than attempting to rise above all identification with the body, though, Norris's novel indicates that a more productive response may lie precisely in attempting to grapple with one's own embodied "otherness." Suggesting a social relation interior to the body, *Vandover and the Brute* points strongly to a sense of continuity with others issuing from greater awareness of oneself as a body. While critics of Norris's novel have assumed that the body, governed by drives, is virtually built or designed to act in self-interested "instinctual" ways, such accounts have overlooked the important ways in which these texts, as I have tried to show here, place emphasis on the ways in which bodies may actually be built *for* openness to the influence of other bodies and the surrounding world.<sup>123</sup> Not simply an obstacle to community

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<sup>122</sup>Such a character also surfaces as something of a parodic figure in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* in the form of Ralph Marvell, who frequently bemoans his own "hidden hereditary failing" of biological weakness (274).

<sup>123</sup>Suggesting that fuller inhabitation of the body is encouraged in Norris's texts as a resource for strengthening social relations greatly departs from enduring views of Norris's fiction that underline its preoccupation with tracing self-interest and self-preserving actions to the "animal instinct" of the body. Klaus Benesch argues, for example, that *Vandover and the Brute* "emphasizes the importance of the instinctual life and yet demonizes and condemns it simultaneously" (151). Elaborating on the primacy of self-interest and self-preservation, Benesch refers to the shipwreck scene in the middle of the novel to conclude that "In moments of panic and terror, the passengers and the crew succumb—to varying degrees—to the animal within and obey the instinct of self-preservation" (152). This understanding of the body is reinforced by other critics such as Howard who, as I pointed out in chapter one, whose readings tend to privilege disembodied narrators. Drawing explicitly on

among persons, the body, as both texts explore, may encourage less self-interested ways of operating and hold promise for strengthening relations among persons.<sup>124</sup>

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Howard's interpretive framework Schierenbeck asserts that "The gaze of naturalism, like the gaze of clinical observation, structures a discourse of healthy/morbid opposition, for part of Norris's aesthetic is the focus of his naturalistic gaze on the abnormal" (72).

<sup>124</sup>Again, the resonance with recent readings of phenomenology is important here; Hamington in *Embodied Care* proposes, for instance, that given its permeability, the body is "built to care."

#### 4.0 SEPARATE BODIES, SEVERED BODIES: CHARLES CHESNUTT'S *THE MARROW OF TRADITION*

did he too feel it on his forehead,  
the gentle raillery of the wind,  
as the rope pulled taut over the tree  
in the cool dawn?  
("Morning Ride," Lola Ridge)

With its emphasis on racial violence, Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) takes up the particularly vexed relationship between African American citizens and the operation of law in the post-Reconstruction era. Alluding to overt manifestations of injustices endured by blacks, Eric Sundquist characterizes the law within Jim Crow culture as an "unstable terrain subject to capricious subversion by racism" (431). Sundquist's statement refers, in particular, to rampant attempts on the part of some whites to suppress African Americans' participation in government and economic enterprise through violent acts such as lynching. Anxious over their perceived loss of political, economic, and social power, white insurrectionists used the pretext of black criminality to justify their violent actions. As scholars have well documented, accusations of African American males' sexual violation of white women typically formed the basis of these claims about the alleged criminality of African Americans. Elucidating the emergence of this connection between citizenry and charges of sexual aggression, historian Martha Hodes states that the "idea of manhood, which had long implied the rights and responsibilities of citizenship

in American political thought, now took on connotations, in white minds, of black sexual agency, and specifically of sexual transgressions with white women” (61).<sup>125</sup> In this assessment, the granting of citizenship, a status inextricably linked with masculinity at this time, paradoxically provided some whites impetus for the violent suppression of black males.<sup>126</sup>

This potent mythology thus served ultimately to incite the subversions of law that Sundquist underlines and with which *The Marrow of Tradition* is fundamentally concerned. Ian Finseth points out, for instance, that Chesnutt’s novel “reveals that the law’s text does not in fact transcend the underlying spirit, as it should in a society governed by the ‘rule of law,’ and makes clear that this spirit is one of naked bigotry and self-interest” (6).<sup>127</sup> At the same time, critics such as Gregg Crane point out that *The Marrow of Tradition* undermines the notion that tradition is utterly resistant to changes in racial power relations, suggesting in turn, Chesnutt’s belief in “the power of literature to revise custom and thereby necessitate and enable revision of the nation’s law” (197).<sup>128</sup> Something of a blessing and a curse, custom, understood as a type of

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<sup>125</sup>Further linking this phenomenon to post-Reconstruction economic conditions, Sundquist remarks, “Male hysteria was not primarily about rape; it was about votes and the feared loss of white southern virility, which in turn sprang from the region’s prolonged economic deterioration which had reached the stage of depression by the end of the century” (425).

<sup>126</sup>It is important to keep in mind that despite African Americans’ status as national citizens, given the extent of power granted to the states, full exercise of citizenship privileges remained limited. For a lucid history of Congressional Reconstruction, see Belz.

<sup>127</sup>For Finseth, Chesnutt’s focus on legality brings into view a founding “fiction” of the nation: “[Chesnutt] exposes the nation’s central jurisprudential illusion: the notion that the law is a fixed, neutral set of rules abstracted from and superior to individual human motives” (5). Both Gregg Crane and Brook Thomas highlight a passage from Chesnutt’s first novel, *The House Behind Cedars* (1900), directly expressing the strength of custom through the sentiments of Judge Straights: “ ‘Custom is law...Right and wrong...must be eternal verities, but our standards for measuring them vary with our latitude and our epoch. We make our customs lightly; once made, like our sins, they grip us in bands of steel; we become the creatures of our creations’ ” (qtd. in Crane 195).

<sup>128</sup>In this way, Crane stresses, Chesnutt is distinct from contemporaries such as social scientist Charles Sumner, author of *Folkways* (1906), which “embraced the imperviousness of social customs and traditions” (196). Thomas likewise notes Chesnutt’s strategy of setting legality against the “province of literature,” for which the purpose was to “accustom the public mind to the idea [of social recognition and equality for African Americans]” (172). These readings contrast with markedly bleaker views of the novel which also gesture to Chesnutt’s

action or habit<sup>129</sup> lying outside regulation of the law, makes the law subject to racist subversions, but might also contribute to revising racist law. In this chapter I want to build on Crane's observation by proposing that Chesnutt understood embodied experience, in particular, as a crucial element that might counter the "naked bigotry and self-interest" of racist customs and traditions.<sup>130</sup> In accordance with the claims I have made throughout this study, I want to show that Chesnutt's novel, too, suggests that persons might be bound to each other, or corporeally continuous with one another as a "carnal community," described in previous chapters. However, I want to argue here that Chesnutt's novel further shows how the structure of social environments—in this case, a structure dictated largely by a culture of segregation in the Jim Crow era—could work to obstruct the body's capacity for the receptiveness to other bodies that makes possible such community.

Much literary criticism of *The Marrow of Tradition* has centered around the question of whether Chesnutt's fictional treatment of the lynching crisis at the turn of the century affirms a non-violent, accommodationist, or violent political stance on the part of African Americans. In such readings, Dr. Miller, friendly with whites and politically non-threatening, validates an

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sometimes association with determinism and naturalism. Roe, for instance, claims that "the tragedy of the novel lies in [Chesnutt's] recognition of the futility of his labor, how the hegemony of Southern 'tradition' is perpetuated in the very marrow of white (and black) consciousness in the South" (231).

<sup>129</sup>Ryan Simmons in *Chesnutt and Realism* discusses custom in terms of habit, conceiving of habit as "practices that people enact seemingly without a thought" (91).

<sup>130</sup>Chesnutt's interest in the particularities of embodied experience is also consistent with the ways in which some critics have conceived of his approach to the project of the historical novel. Matthew Wilson, among others, has described Chesnutt's novel as constructing a "counter-memory," a recollection of the Wilmington massacre that counter authoritative press accounts of the event (a point of contention for some of Chesnutt's early critics who faulted him for straying from the actual details of the acts that took place in 1898 in North Carolina). As Wilson notes, counter-memory serves as "a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives" (112).



accommodationist position while Josh Green, committed to violent suppression of whites who have themselves violated blacks, represents a militant response.<sup>131</sup> Readings that emphasize a textual ambiguity in the novel whereby both views are at once affirmed have disturbed some critics. William Gleason has objected, for example, to “the tendency in Chesnutt criticism...to make *The Marrow of Tradition* talk out of both sides of his mouth at the same time” whereby critics claim that Miller’s position is validated at a conscious level at the same time that Green’s voice remains present though repressed (225).<sup>132</sup> I propose instead that Chesnutt’s approach to the lynching crisis is more concerned with exposing lynching’s relationships to segregation laws that, by separating bodies, obstruct opportunities for cross-racial contacts that might serve to resist or altogether preclude racially motivated violence.

I want to emphasize that it is not my intent in this chapter to enlist Chesnutt’s novel in making a historical claim about how persons actually responded to segregation laws at the turn of the century in the U.S. Indeed, it is important to recognize that segregation was uneven, not absolute, and that persons did not always live by the terms of the law (which is also made clear in a different way by the rampant subversions of law described above). Certainly, the history of the Civil Rights movement indicates that African Americans and whites managed to form meaningful contacts and alliances. My point, rather, is that Chesnutt, who was writing at a particularly bleak and uncertain moment just on the heels of the 1893 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* verdict, suggests how limited cross-racial contacts might have contributed to shaping a

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<sup>131</sup>Summing up the trajectory of this debate, Gleason observes, “Most of Chesnutt’s contemporaries were deeply disturbed by the book’s seeming endorsement, though Josh, of Afro-American rebellion. The intervening years, however, have given rise to a different view—that Chesnutt actually played ‘accommodationist literary politics...throughout his literary career.’ Miller, critics now believe, is Chesnutt’s more likely spokesperson” (224).

<sup>132</sup>The unfortunate consequence this reading holds, according to Gleason, is that it “represses other voices that *consciously* endorse Josh’s position at the turn of the century” (225), and his essay reads Chesnutt in relation to these voices.

particularly troubling direction of race relations. The number of lynchings of African Americans climbed steadily throughout the 1880s and 1890s, from 49 in 1882 to 161 just ten years later in 1892.<sup>133</sup> Perhaps even more disturbing than these statistics, however, was the shift in the nature of lynchings at this time. As Anne P. Rice points out, “lynchings had evolved from clandestine operations carried out in the dead of night into widely publicized festivals held in the light of day and carefully choreographed, recorded, and marketed throughout the nation” (2). Given the acuteness of these conditions, Chesnutt and his contemporaries were pressed to dig deeper in seeking explanations for the prevalence of these abhorrent acts. Making international comparisons, Frederick Douglass, for instance, identified the relative increase in prosperity among African Americans as the primary reason for lynch law:

The resistance met by the Negro is to me evidence that he is making progress. The Jew is hated in Russia, because he is thrifty. The Chinaman is hated in California because he is industrious and successful. The Negro meets no resistance when on a downward course. It is only when he rises in wealth, intelligence, and manly character that he brings upon himself the heavy hand of persecution. The men lynched at Memphis were murdered because they were prosperous. (“Lynch Law in the South” 41)

In pamphlets such as *Southern Horrors: Lynching Law in All its Phases* (1882) and *Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to the Death: The Story of His Life, Burning Human Beings Alive (and) Other Lynching Statistics* (1900), Ida B. Wells similarly analyzed lynch law’s function in working to curb the economic and political power of blacks. By dissecting

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<sup>133</sup>On lynching statistics and the failures of proposed anti-lynching bills, see *The Other Reconstruction: Where Violence and Womanhood Meet in the Writings of Wells-Barnett, Grimke, and Larsen* by Ericka M. Miller (xviii-xx).

numerous lynching cases, Wells famously and crucially helped to expose the myth of the black male rapist. Chesnutt, too, through his fiction seemed interested to not only get at the underlying motivations behind lynching, but also, I think, to analyze more closely the phenomena of spectacle lynching as well as lynching-era race riots, which some have referred to as “magnified or mass lynching” (qtd. in Rice 3), that marked the veritable height of insensitivity to African American bodies.

Based on actual events of the Wilmington Massacre of 1898 in Wilmington, North Carolina, Chesnutt’s historical novel centers on the inhabitants of the fictional Southern town of Wellington.<sup>134</sup> *The Marrow of Tradition* focuses, in particular, on two families, the Carterets and the Millers, and the relations between them. As the novel opens, Major Carteret’s wife, Olivia, is giving birth to son Dodie. Editor of the town’s newspaper, Major Carteret’s main concern is combating “Negro domination,” or African Americans’ perceived infiltration into offices of local and state government; his editorials help to stir racist sentiment that later provokes the massacre. Olivia is half sister to Janet Miller, daughter of a former slave whom we later find was married to Olivia’s white father. Although Janet longs to be publicly recognized by her sister, Olivia refuses to grant any such acknowledgment. Janet is married to Adam Miller, an African American doctor. The central action of the novel involves an accusation against Sandy Campbell, servant of the Carteret’s family friend, Old Mr. Delamere. Sandy is falsely accused of the robbery and murder of Olivia’s aunt, Polly Ochiltree. In fact, Delamere’s grandson, Tom, has committed the murder, and this fact comes to light (via Old Delamere himself) just in time to save Sandy from the intended lynching. While the lynching is called off, a massacre

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<sup>134</sup>For an interpretation of Chesnutt’s novel within a detailed account of the Wilmington Racial Massacre, see Jae Roe’s “Keeping an ‘Old Wound’ Alive: *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Legacy of Wilmington.”

nevertheless ensues in which a large number of the town's black citizens are murdered and the Millers' son is killed by a stray bullet. In the midst of the violence, the Carterets' son Dodie falls ill. In the novel's climactic closing scenes, Olivia dramatically appeals to her bereaved sister, who reluctantly agrees to allow her husband to operate on Dodie.

In prior chapters, I have described the qualities of the phenomenological body that London, Dreiser, and Norris emphasize in their novels, qualities that make the body permeable to its surroundings, including the bodies of others. I have pointed out, especially, these writers' interest in nonvisual perceptions that strongly register another body's presence or suffering, sometimes to the extent that this presence becomes a compelling feature of a character's own experience, helping to shape belief and motivate action. Chesnutt's attention to these aspects of embodiment is particularly significant in the context of African Americans' presence in the U.S. body politic at the turn of the century. His novel responds in part, it seems, to the dominant role vision played in structuring racial relations during this period.<sup>135</sup> Studies of this period have emphasized the ways in which the visual culture of the South sustained and promoted white superiority through mass-produced images of blacks in subservient roles. The ubiquity of images such as the silly buffoon or the dependable servant all served "to counter the unnerving 'apparition' of black self-sovereignty" (Bentley and Gunning 424). Chesnutt in *The Marrow of*

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<sup>135</sup>Many critics have discussed Chesnutt's fictional rendering of vision throughout their readings of his novels. In particular, Bryan Wagner has admirably shown how *The Marrow of Tradition* demonstrates the ways in which visual epistemology figured strongly into whites' hostility towards African Americans. Wagner argues that by asserting a stronger presence, the African American middle class reconfigured the visual field for the whites of fictional Wellington, thereby inciting an "epistemological rupture," on the part of whites. Specifically, he explains, "In these moments of deep racial anxiety, the sight of African Americans in places of economic power disrupts the racial truths that orient Southern whites in space and time. The African American middle class, in other words, provokes an epistemological crisis that is simultaneously a crisis of white identity" (312). The direct consequence of that crisis, in Wagner's account "visual disturbance," is violence against African Americans, for these disturbances of vision provoke whites' literal attempts to expunge African Americans from their visual field. My work in some ways builds on this essay by also exploring Chesnutt's interest in the ways in which visual perceptions contributed to oppressive race relations, but I also go on to consider how the novel suggests that other dimensions of embodiment might intervene to challenge visual epistemology.

*Tradition* demonstrates great familiarity with these icons, deploying a spectrum of “types” such as the doting Mammy Jane, obsequious Jerry, and loyal servant Sandy. Besides functioning to shape the race relations of an antebellum South, the effect of these visual depictions in popular culture, as Bentley and Sandra Gunning point out, was also to relegate African Americans to the past (427).<sup>136</sup> In this way, visual culture worked to undermine the immediacy of African Americans’ presence to white Americans, reinforcing their distance and separateness from whites, effecting “a subtle segregation in time rather than space” (Bentley and Gunning 427). Along this line, Felipe Smith further elaborates the implications of this “politics of time.” Drawing on critiques of anthropological studies, Smith indicates that stereotypical representations of African Americans functioned to deny “simultaneity to nonwhite others,” rendering them “as irremediably trapped in the allochronic time of the primitive” (35-36).<sup>137</sup>

As Pricilla Wald explains, official calls for a “national self-consciousness” at the time further contributed to the vulnerable status of African Americans by denying them a meaningful presence and threatening their claims to kinship in the modern nation.<sup>138</sup> The outpouring of histories in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries helped to forge this national self-consciousness with, in the words of W. E. B. DuBois, “frontal attacks on Reconstruction” and

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<sup>136</sup>Scenes from an antebellum past were likewise featured at fairs and exhibitions at this time for white viewers’ entertainment (Bentley and Gunning 425).

<sup>137</sup>Citing Johannes Fabian, Smith explains, “With the help of various devices of sequencing and distancing one assigns to the conquered populations a *different* Time” (35). Smith adds, “Fabian calls this systemic denial of ‘coevalness’ allochronism. By denying simultaneity to nonwhite others, the politics of time, in effect, creates not Anderson’s homogeneous but Fabian’s allochronic (or heterogeneous time)” (35). Smith further notes, “This denial leads to judgments about the relative worth of ‘people outside history,’ in Anderson’s phrase, and thereafter potentially to denials of kinship” (34).

<sup>138</sup>In fact, Wald highlights Woodrow Wilson’s use of the language of kinship to characterize national ties in speeches and essays he produced in the 1890s (200-202).

narratives downplaying African achievements (174).<sup>139</sup> Just as these histories worked to restore unity between the white North and South in ways that created perceptions negatively impacting African Americans, turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialist activities functioned in a similar manner. As critics have noted, *The Marrow of Tradition* registers consciousness of imperialism's influence at various moments in the text. Samira Kawash, among others, has pointed out the ways in which American imperial conquests worked in concert with efforts to suppress African Americans' social advancement. Taking place along with the Wilmington Massacre in 1898, the Spanish-American war, remarks Kawash, "symbolically completed the project of reunification by joining North and South in a specifically national struggle against a common enemy. Similarly, the instigators of the Wilmington riot aimed to restore white supremacy by joining the various factions of white society in Wilmington against the 'external enemy' of blackness" (93).<sup>140</sup> Popular fictions like the notoriously racist *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) by Thomas Dixon reinforced the notion that U.S. imperialism might offer opportunities for strengthening a specifically white national unity. As Smith notes, Dixon's novel "expressly celebrated the Spanish-American War, in which white northerners and southerners fought side by side against a common external enemy, as a turning point in domestic race relations" (7). Amy Kaplan has likewise shown the racist implications of Teddy Roosevelt's exploits at San Juan Hill, as Roosevelt expressed fears over the intermingling of black and white troops, prompting him to "reassert the color line at the same time to forge the bond of national unity" (230). Furthermore,

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<sup>139</sup>Wald notes, "Historians like Burgess and Dunning wrote that story in accordance with the racist segregationist policies of Jim Crow laws, which logically extended a developmental narrative of black progress in which Africans had never successfully created a civilization" (174).

<sup>140</sup>Likewise positing a connection between U.S. imperialist activities and the disenfranchisement of African Americans at home, Matthew Wilson points out that the same issue of the national magazine *Collier's* containing an article approving the violent actions of white vigilantes undertaken in Wilmington also included several articles asserting that Cubans were ill-prepared for self-government (109).

as Kaplan emphasizes, Roosevelt's accounts of the war against Spain drastically minimize the accomplishments of African American soldiers, bolstering his arguments against African Americans' fitness for leadership positions in government at home (Kaplan 227).<sup>141</sup>

We might, then, broadly understand Chesnut's novel as responding to the racist sentiments that threatened to intensify given these circumstances at the turn of the century as well as to this crucial moment of shaping of African Americans' place in the "national consciousness." One of the key problems that *The Marrow of Tradition* explores are the troublesome implications of the fact that, under segregation, whites' embodied experiences by and large lacked a meaningful presence of African Americans. Vision continued to be the primary means by which white Americans related to black Americans with the problematic effects I described above, and opportunities for nonvisual encounters remained limited. As the novel's treatment of embodiment suggests, not only does such a situation create difficulties for the extension of "kinship" to African Americans, but it also seems to serve as an enabling condition for the horrific acts of violence against them.

Some recent critical accounts offer enriched understandings of the seemingly obvious oppressiveness of segregation laws. While a white person's claim to post-bellum racial superiority could no longer be tied to citizenship status, Angelo Robinson points out, segregation served to generate white "clout" and thus could be understood as mandating the supremacy of whites (98). Further undermining the notion of an equal separateness, Kawash highlights the

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<sup>141</sup>Kaplan points out that other accounts of the battle reveal evidence that African American troops in the Tenth Cavalry actually had to rescue Roosevelt's Rough Riders on several occasions, an obvious affront to his celebrated virility that likely helps to explain his remarks and distortions concerning African Americans (227). Kaplan's related study of how historical romances of this period helped to generate zeal for U.S. imperialist pursuits also figures into the nexus of imperialism and racist sentiment toward African Americans in the U.S. in that imperialism worked to heal the rift between northern and southern states. Though Kaplan does not discuss historical novels involving the Civil War or Reconstruction, more explicit restoration of north-south harmony was a major component of novels like Thomas Nelson Page's 1898 *Red Rock A Chronicle of Reconstruction* (which concludes with an inter-sectional marriage between Northern woman and southern man).

insidious nature of segregation's effects, noting "that very separateness only appears neutral; it is in fact predicated on, and maintained in order to protect the property and privilege of whiteness" (Kawash 98).<sup>142</sup> With regard to Chesnutt, Bentley similarly proposes that "Chesnutt recognized that the chief harm in the *Plessy* decision's separate-but-equal principle came not from racial separation per se, nor even from civil restrictions, but from the injury of racial stigma, the effect of the marking out of black people—as Chesnutt puts it, the harm from being 'branded and tagged'" (463).

I would insist, however, that Chesnutt *is* chiefly concerned to suggest the harm of separating bodies. With limited opportunities for contact among black and white bodies, segregation breeds something of a corporeal "discontinuity" among whites and nonwhites, in which neither can appreciate a meaningful presence of the other, the dangerous end of which seems to be the atrocious acts of violence the novel later takes up. Similarly, the lack of immediate presence of African Americans for whites under these conditions contributes to the continued denial of their claims to kinship in the modern nation. Along this line, some scholars have suggested that segregation encouraged even less sympathy or concern for African Americans on the part of whites than slavery did. Drawing on C. Vann Woodward's classic study of Jim Crow culture, Kawash points out that while systematic racial segregation existed in Northern "free" states before the Civil War, segregation was not instituted in the South until emancipation since the policing of slaves involved constant surveillance.<sup>143</sup> Kawash notes, "As

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<sup>142</sup>Exemplifying the opinion that segregation laws constituted an innocuous outgrowth of ostensibly natural race categories is one Supreme Court Justice's argument in favor of *Plessy*. As Kawash explains, "Justice Brown suggests that because the races are already unequal and therefore separate, the law merely reflects this natural division. By insisting that the law merely reflects the nature of things, Brown implies that the law has nothing to say about the production and perpetuation of white privilege" (98).

<sup>143</sup>Emphasizing northerners' implication in perpetuating Southern racist practices, Kawash additionally notes, "Contrary to current interpretations of this decision as a watershed moment in US legal history, the *Plessy*



Woodward persuasively argues, slavery was a system requiring physical proximity and often intimacy, between white master and black slave” and that, in Woodward’s words, “The supervision, maintenance of order, and physical and medical care of slaves necessitated many contacts and encouraged a degree of intimacy between the races unequalled, and often held distasteful, in other parts of the country” (95). Acknowledging that Woodward’s account has sometimes been criticized as a Southern apology, Kawash rejects Woodward’s conclusion affirming the humanity of Southern paternalism over segregationist racism in the north (95). This history nevertheless, Kawash goes on to emphasize, usefully illuminates the effects of segregationist policies and practices which limited contacts and intimacies between the races.

In line with Kawash, others have indicated the ways in which bodily proximity can constitute a key element of sympathy, pointing towards the harmful outcomes of segregation as it, in the words of Eileen Borris, “restrict[s] the contours of association” (2). In her analysis of W. E. B. Du Bois’s work, for instance, Joane van der Woude describes Du Bois’s lamentation over the ways in which social segregation prevents sympathy between the races.<sup>144</sup> Drawing attention to Du Bois’s particular emphasis on the role of the body and sensory observation in his account of sympathetic interaction, van der Woude notes that, for Du Bois, such a process requires one “to take a man by the hand and sit beside him, to look frankly into his eyes and feel his heart beating with red blood” (qtd. in van der Woude 94). Du Bois’s sentiment gestures toward the sense of corporeal continuity I have discussed in other chapters. van der Woude notes that, in Du Bois’s conception, “proximity remains a key condition of sympathetic

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decision was not shocking or even remarkable to turn-of-the-century white sensibilities because it conformed to conventional white supremacist wisdom and long-standing practice” (95).

<sup>144</sup>Van der Woude refers specifically to Du Bois’s statement in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “There is almost no community where the thoughts and feelings of one race can come into direct contact and sympathy with the thoughts and feelings of the other” (qtd. in van der Woude 94).

identification, which means that slavery, rather than segregation, is actually more likely to facilitate sympathy” (95).

While this proposition may on the surface seem rather incredible, such an idea, I believe, nonetheless invites closer consideration. Certainly any claim for the virtues of proximity of the races is of course greatly complicated within the context of a slaveholding society. In his landmark history of slavery, Eugene Genovese elaborates how the close living arrangements of slaves and slaveholders helped to encourage the problematic paternalism upon which slavery was founded.<sup>145</sup> Slaveholders’ acts of kindness encouraged at least in part by their proximity to and intimacy with their slaves could no doubt go hand in hand with furthering their broader motives of encouraging the morale and hence productivity of slaves, serving the planters’ own ends and sustaining the institution of slavery.<sup>146</sup> Taking this criticism a bit further we might also think of the censuring of kind, sympathetic slaveholders in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by one observer at a slave auction. Referring to the merciless slaveholder, Simon Legree, the man indicts these “humane” types, admonishing, “it is your respectability and humanity that licenses and protects his brutality” (336).<sup>147</sup> Moreover, proximity between owners and slaves

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<sup>145</sup>Genovese explains that, contrary to popular notions about the prevalence of absenteeism among planters, it was common for most slaveholders to have frequent personal contacts with their slaves, both house servants and field hands (10). Commenting on the what he views as the chief danger of paternalistic relations central to slavery, Genovese notes, “Wherever paternalism exists, it undermines solidarity among the oppressed by linking them as individuals to their oppressors” (5). At the same time, Genovese’s analysis acknowledges a paradoxical effect of paternalism, as he observes, “Paternalism’s insistence upon mutual obligations—duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights—implicitly recognized the slaves’ humanity” (5).

<sup>146</sup>Further indicating the limitations of such sympathetic expression, Genovese notes that seldom would their sympathies override slaveholders’ own financial interests, as they would not hesitate to sell off slaves they claimed as part of the “family,” a frequent theme of Chesnut’s short fiction. The notion that slaves were part of the white slaveholding family was also detrimental to slaves who were thus presumed to have little or no ties to families of their own, an attitude Harriet Jacobs’s narrative identifies in *Mistress Flint* (34).

<sup>147</sup>As Stowe’s novel also illustrates, proximity of the races could serve to weaken or reverse so-called sympathetic sentiment, typified by the character of Miss Ophelia, a Northern abolitionist who moves in with her cousin St. Clare’s slaveholding family in an effort to educate slave children, but can barely contain her revulsion

that Genovese documents could also be seen as a condition that encouraged many of the violent acts committed by slaveholders. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Frederick Douglass describes, for instance, the methods of surveillance employed by his brutal master Covey, or the way in which, “He had the faculty of making us feel that he was ever present with us... he appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation” (72-3). Intimating that it is exactly this kind of proximity that alerts Covey to Douglass’s intellect and strength, what amounts to his “unmanageability,” Douglass notes that: “Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute” (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* 74). Likewise, the sexual abuse that Harriet Jacobs recalls enduring in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) arises out of her constant proximity to the lecherous Dr. Flint, the sense of which is captured in her recollection of Flint’s “whisper[ing of] foul words” into her ear (26).

At the same time, however, the absence of segregation during slavery made possible a proximity between whites and blacks that could enable important cross-racial relationships. These relationships in turn, as Genovese’s study indicates, could at times act as a brake or deterrent on violent and abusive slaveholders that in some cases could subtly undermine the aims of slavery (655). In Jacobs’s narrative, for instance, Miss Fanny, a white friend of Harriet’s

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upon being touched by young Topsy. St. Clare’s response to Ophelia’s confession of her initial discomfort is interesting for its highlighting of the primacy of such contacts in human interactions. Musing that she never thought that Topsy noticed her tendency to shrink from physical contact with the child, St. Clare retorts, “Trust any child to find that out...there’s no keeping it from them. But I believe that all the trying in the world to benefit the child, and all the substantial favors you can do them, will ever excite one emotion of gratitude, while that feeling of repugnance remains in the heart...” (279).

grandmother visits Harriet at the plantation specifically in an attempt to intervene in stopping the abusive treatment she suspects Dr. Flint is inflicting upon Harriet: “She said her principal object in coming was to see how I was treated, and whether anything could be done for me” (76). Another longtime friend of Harriet’s grandmother assists Harriet in altogether escaping her situation at the Flint plantation. Though a slaveholder herself, the woman offers to hide Harriet during her effort to flee to the north. Perhaps, then, it was not so much the sympathy between masters and their slaves that constituted the most potentially destabilizing force against racial oppression, but these other cross-racial relationships that also depended upon greater proximity of whites and blacks. If we think further to the post-bellum period, segregation presumably reduces the opportunities for the development of similar relationships between the races that might function as a sanction on violence against African Americans in the Jim Crow era. Admittedly, these observations are speculative and as I explained earlier, it is not my intent to suggest how persons actually behaved under either segregation or slavery. I further want to stress that this comparison is not meant to affirm slavery.<sup>148</sup> My excursion into this history is only an effort to illuminate how segregation could theoretically limit opportunities for encounters between white and nonwhite bodies, thereby threatening or at least greatly diminishing the prospects for cross-racial sympathy. While greater proximity of whites and African Americans would surely be no guarantee that whites’ concern for blacks would be stimulated, the prospect of its absence may have been troubling for writers such as Chesnutt, especially given the direction racial relations appeared to be heading in at this moment.

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<sup>148</sup>Similarly, Hartman notes of her observations concerning the constraints faced by African Americans in post-Reconstruction: “Here the point is not to efface the differences between slavery and freedom, however intangible, or deny the dishonor, degradation, and extreme violence of slavery but rather to underline the difficulty of installing an absolute distinction between slavery and freedom and to disclose the perverse entanglements of the ‘grand narrative of emancipation’” (139).

Ostensibly “about” slavery but written at the turn of the century, Chesnutt’s conjure stories gesture towards this concern over the effects of whites’ rather circumscribed contact with African Americans under segregation. Published in 1899, these stories feature the tales of southern plantation life as recollected by “Uncle” Julius McAdoo, an ex-slave hired as a coachman by John and Annie, a Northern white couple who have relocated to North Carolina in order to raise grapes in an abandoned vineyard. John’s brief narration at the beginning and end of the stories frame Julius’s retelling, in dialect, of events on the plantation, underscoring the scene in which white listeners in the present moment are taking in these tales. The stories literally and metaphorically convey white characters’ indifference and blindness to the physical and emotional suffering of black characters. In the tale Julius relates in “Po’ Sandy,” Sandy, a slave, laments his fate of being separated from his lover Tenie due to the whim of Master Marrado, who plans to lend Sandy to a neighbor. Tenie, a conjure woman, turns Sandy into a tree so that he can remain near her. However, disaster strikes soon after when Marrado decides to build a new kitchen and cuts down the tree into which Sandy was turned to use for lumber. Julius details Sandy’s ordeal of being dragged through the mud, chained up, and eventually deposited at the sawmill. Significantly, listeners and readers of Julius’s rendering of the event are attuned to the idea that the tree is a body when whites in the tale are oblivious. The tale in that sense offers readers and listeners a unique perspective from which to appreciate the suffering that Sandy induces. Stressing the on-going memory of Sandy’s anguish, Julius explains that after the kitchen is built, “Dey could hear sump’n moanin’ en groanin’ bout de kitchen in de nighttime, en w’en de win’ would blow dey could hear sump’n a-hollerin’ en sweekin’ lack it wuz in great pain en sufferin’” (22). When the story shifts back to the scene of the white listeners, Annie appears moved by the tale, as she “murmured absently, and with a dim look in

her fine eyes, ‘Poor Tenie!’” (23). Despite her vigorous denial to John of believing in the fantastical element of the story, Annie nevertheless shows the story’s influence on her by deciding not to build her own new kitchen out of the old lumber surrounding their property after all.

In another of the tales Julius recounts in “Dave’s Neckliss,” Dave, one of Master Dugal’s slaves, is falsely accused of stealing bacon and is punished by being forced to wear a ham on a chain around his neck for six months. During this time he is ostracized by nearly everyone around him. After his period of punishment ends, Dave begins to believe that he is a ham. When the true thief is later revealed, Dugal instructs the others to go back to treating Dave as if nothing has happened. Julius goes to tell Dave the news, but instead finds that he has hanged himself by a rope, “des lack de hams wuz tied,” over a fire in the smokehouse (101). As in “Po’ Sandy,” listeners and readers of the tale in “Dave’s Neckliss” know something that whites in the story do not which grants them special insight into the extent of Dave’s suffering. Here again, that the tale has affected Annie on some level is suggested by the detail that after listening to the story she “pensively” declares her wish to get rid of the ham that had prompted Julius’s memory of the story.

Chesnutt’s short fiction works to stimulate particular sensitivity to the suffering of black bodies for white listeners and readers at a moment in which opportunities for cross-racial contacts were limited. *The Marrow of Tradition* further addresses this concern. In the novel, Chesnutt steadily plots a line between the segregation of bodies and the racial violence against bodies with which the novel concludes. In this way, the novel underscores the potentially harrowing outcomes of the obstructed sense of cross-racial corporeal continuity under segregation. Further emphasizing the ways in which segregation especially discourages a sense

of corporeal continuity among persons, we might also consider one of the prevailing notions of this time that segregation might expedite a desired “Negro extinction.” Felipe Smith notes, “While quarantine appears on the surface to be a less radical solution than expulsion, its adoption and standardization often received impetus from the belief that black Americans would eventually die out as a group and therefore like other sick populations should be prevented from infecting whites” (43). We might locate Chesnutt’s novel as a response to this “solution,” as Smith further proposes that this “pronouncement of a death sentence upon black America by some social scientists” lent urgency to “the conscious collective ‘renaissance’ of black American artistic production beginning at the turn of the century” (xiii).<sup>149</sup>

In an 1880 journal entry, Chesnutt issues his oft-cited aim to bring about “the elevation of whites” through the work of his fiction. Meditating further, he elaborates that he wishes “to lead them on, imperceptibly, unconsciously, step by step, to the desired state of feeling” (140).<sup>150</sup> Indeed, *The Marrow of Tradition* is just as concerned with examining the bodies of white characters as African American characters.<sup>151</sup> The novel’s very opening highlights a white character’s capacity for openness to the influence of another body. As Major Carteret holds his

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<sup>149</sup>On segregation and race extinction, see John Haller’s *Outcasts from Evolution*.

<sup>150</sup>These sentiments raise the issue of Chesnutt’s relationship to his white readership. Critics have noted *Marrow*’s marked distinction from both popular dialect stories and historical romances of the period, both of which sought to avoid offending a white readership and to confirm white readers’ sense of racial superiority by featuring familiar stereotypical figures evoking impressions of blacks’ happy subservience and gross incompetence (Baker 139). Like Joel Chandler Harris, Chesnutt took advantage of the market’s enthusiasm for dialect stories, though Barbara Baker and others have argued that Chesnutt employs in his dialect stories a signifying strategy as a means of “seizing and inverting [the] cultural power” invested in racist literary depictions (139). Historical romances such as Nelson Page’s *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* (1898) likewise glorified antebellum America, affirming “a continuity of the tradition of the paternalistic, slave-holding ethic” (Wilson 122).

<sup>151</sup>Much enlightening criticism on the construction of whiteness in Chesnutt’s novels has recently been published. Critics such as Matthew Wilson have articulated some of the strategies by which Chesnutt makes whiteness marked, thereby destabilizing his white audiences. For instance, Wilson observes, white characters are object of studies for black characters such as Mammy Jane and Jerry, creating a kind of “double consciousness” in which whites are made aware of being seen by blacks. In Finseth’s reading of the novel, these studies of white characters on the part of African American characters notably include visual scrutiny (14).

wife Olivia's hand during her difficult childbearing experience, the narrator notes, "The major shivered with apprehension as the slender hand which he held in his own contracted nervously and in a spasm of pain clutched his fingers with a viselike grip" (1). The touching of hands here immediately produces an effect in Carteret as the depiction captures the reciprocal quality of touch we have noted in other texts. Moreover, Chesnutt frames central incidents of the novel with attention to contact or lack of contact among the bodies of characters. Emphasis on cross-racial touching figures into the narrator's initial characterization of the relationship between Old Delamere and his servant Sandy. As Sandy assists Delamere upon their arrival at Dodie's christening party, the narrator remarks that Sandy "gave his arm respectfully to the old gentleman, who leaned upon it heavily, but with as little appearance of dependence as possible. The servant, assuming a similar unconsciousness of the weight resting upon his arm, assisted the old gentleman carefully up the steps" (14). Revealing the extent to which this assumption of "unconsciousness" in Delamere's reliance on Sandy is indeed a guise, the narrator later describes Delamere's departure from the party, stating, "Under cover of the darkness the old gentleman leaned on his servant's arm with frank dependence and Sandy lifted him into the carriage with every mark of devotion" (26). In these passages, the vulnerability of Delamere's aging body necessitates a receptiveness to Sandy's touch. Delamere's unavoidable recognition of his own precarious bodily status stimulates an awareness of Sandy's presence and seems to facilitate an empathy for the body of another demonstrated later in the novel. By acting to stop Sandy from being lynched in one of the novel's climactic moments, Delamere becomes a rare sympathetic white character. While we might expect an aged white character to exhibit the most rigid or hardened habits of "tradition," the opposite proves true. Chesnutt's depiction of Delamere's



ailing and thus conspicuous embodiment provides an opportunity for highlighting the body's capacity for openness to the influence of another body.

At the same time, deliberate avoidance of cross-racial contact frames episodes of racial hostility eventually leading to violence, as in Chesnutt's characterization of the first meeting of the "Big Three" at the newspaper's headquarters. During this scene, Carteret, General Belmont, and Captain McBane lay the groundwork for the racial violence that later unfolds. Recounting Carteret's refusal to shake hands with Jerry, the office's assistant, as the men congregate to congratulate the major on his son's birth, the narrator notes:

The major shook hands with them all except Jerry, though he acknowledged the porter's congratulations with a kind nod and put a good cigar into his outstretched palm, for which Jerry thanked him without manifesting any consciousness of the omission. He was quite aware that under ordinary circumstances the major would not have shaken hands with white workingmen, to say nothing of Negroes; and he had merely hoped that in the pleasurable distraction of the moment the major might also overlook the distinction of color. (29)

This distanced encounter between Carteret and Jerry directly prefaces Carteret's instigation of the discussion in which the three men proceed to stir up racist sentiment amongst themselves, resolving to squelch the "Negro domination" they perceive to be operating throughout the local government. In seeking to justify their plans, the men reveal the extent to which their perceptions of African Americans are shaped by stereotypical images of blacks as physically and mentally inferior to whites, images especially reinforced by depictions conjuring up the antebellum past. The relations of hostile separation underwriting these plans become reinforced as Jerry enters the room to provide a chair for the general and is literally banished by way of

McBane's nasty glance: "He set a chair for the general, who gave him an amiable nod, to which Jerry responded with a bow and a scrape. Captain McBane made no acknowledgement, but fixed Jerry so fiercely with his single eye that upon placing the chair Jerry made his escape from the room as rapidly as possible" (35). The fervor for "white supremacy everywhere" only continues to intensify after Jerry exits. The emphasis accorded here to vision's role in evoking separation and hostility between characters of different races is a trope that surfaces throughout the novel. Later, for instance, the narrator describes a visual encounter through a window between estranged sisters Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller, remarking, "Mrs. Carteret, chancing to lower her eyes for an instant, caught the other woman's look directed toward her and her child. With a glance of cold aversion she turned away from the window" (106). Noting Janet's reaction, the narrator continues, "Janet, stung by Mrs. Carteret's look,--the nearest approach she had ever made to a recognition of her sister's existence,--had turned away with hardening face" (106).

In these opening scenes which set up crucial events in the novel, Chesnutt suggests the capacity for white characters, even the most aged, to be open to and perhaps even moved to action by their encounters with other bodies. At the same time, he intimates how the utter absence or avoidance of such encounters might further fuel repressive attitudes and actions. What the novel goes on to indicate, moreover, is the extent to which the body's capacities for openness become obstructed or constrained under segregation laws. Significantly, Chesnutt elaborates these concerns in the train scene, a central scene of the novel which, as many critics have noted, bears a direct relation to the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case sanctioning racial

segregation.<sup>152</sup> In this scene old friends Dr. Miller and Dr. Burns are riding into Wellington en route to perform an operation for the Carterets' son Dodie. Framing this important scene is a visual exchange between Dr. Miller and the racist Captain McBane that again underscores hostile relations. Referring to McBane, the narrator observes, "As this passenger turned his head and looked back toward Miller, the latter saw a broad-shouldered, burly white man, and recognized in his square-cut jaw, his coarse, firm mouth, and the single gray eye with which he swept Miller for an instant with a scornful glance, a well-known character of Wellington, with whom the reader has already made acquaintance in these pages" (53). Upon noticing that Dr. Miller is seated with Dr. Burns in the "whites only" car, the conductor insists that Miller move to the car for nonwhites, declaring, "'It's the law of Virginia, and I am bound by it as well as you'" (54). When Dr. Burns attempts to join Miller in the colored car, the conductor informs him that whites aren't permitted to ride in the car designated for non-whites. In response to further protestations, the conductor smugly counters with the reply, "The beauty of the system lies in its strict impartiality—it applies to both races alike" (55). As if to directly undercut the conductor's characterization of the system's "beauty," the narrator goes on to describe the condition of the colored car as Miller enters it: "It was an old car, with faded upholstery, from which the stuffing projected here and there through torn places. Apparently the floor had not been swept for several days. The dust lay thick upon the window sills, and the water-cooler, from which he essayed to

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<sup>152</sup>Chesnutt's deployment of the train has frequently been a point of interest for the novels' critics, even beyond its association with the *Plessy* case. A symbol rife with meaning for African Americans, the train car, as Sundquist notes, was associated with black labor employed in the construction of the railroad and, as suggested in the frequent theme of rail travel in blues music, was linked to migration from particularly oppressive conditions in the South (443). In McWilliams' assessment, "For Chesnutt, the value of the railroad as symbol—and, more specifically, the value of the north-south road—resides in the tension between seeming clarity and deep ambiguity in racial meanings. Nothing seems more straightforward than a train's carefully timed, linear progress. And yet, at the point where the iron rails cross another line, a state boundary, the identities and rights of those who ride the road dramatically change" (148).

get a drink, was filled with stale water which had made no recent acquaintance with ice” (56). Not only does this description expose the falseness of the law’s claim to neutrality in revealing the inferior state of the car for nonwhites, also, as Gregg Crane points out, language such as “old,” “faded,” and “stale” evokes a sense of African Americans occupying a regressive, anti-modern space, distinctly apart from whites.<sup>153</sup>

Furthermore, Chesnutt emphasizes the lack of meaningful presence blacks have for whites as they are accustomed to operating in segregated spaces. At one point, despite the conductor’s stated prohibition on whites riding in the car for blacks, Captain McBane briefly enters the colored car in order to smoke. Describing his entry, the narrator notes, “the rear door of the car opened to give entrance to Captain George McBane, who took a seat near the door and lit a cigar” (57). Temporarily seated on the periphery of the car, McBane maintains a quasi-segregated space from the other passengers. Moreover, as he smokes and spits “carelessly” into the aisle, McBane shows an utter disregard for the presence or comfort of other bodies: “The white man had spread himself over two seats and was smoking vigorously, from time to time spitting carelessly in the aisle, when the conductor entered the compartment” (58). When their presence is made known to him by a third party (the conductor who asks him to leave only after repeated requests from Miller), he only goes out of his way to show disregard, pronouncing, “‘The hell you say!’... ‘I’ll leave this car when I get good and ready, and that won’t be till I’ve finished this cigar” (58). Further marking the shift from oblivion to outright hostility, the narrator notes, “Finally McBane, having thrown the stump of his cigar into the aisle and added to the floor a finishing touch in the way of expectoration, rose and went back into the white car”

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<sup>153</sup> Along this line, Wagner connects segregation to the “plantation myth” that locates African Americans in the past, further noting that “The plantation myth and legalized segregation are not opposites in this analysis, with one looking backward to the past and the other forward to the future; rather, they establish complementary theaters of repression designed to efface and ultimately to counteract disquieting evidence of social change” (323).

(58). This move from a lack of consideration for the African Americans' presence to threatening gestures previews McBane's central role in the race massacre that soon after follows. It is also notable that Chesnutt depicts McBane's particularly virulent expression of hatred as occurring on the train. By situating his behaviors on the train, the ultimate symbol of segregation at the time, Chesnutt indicates that segregation strongly exacerbates racist inclinations. By linking the most blatantly racist character in the novel to the operation of segregation laws, Chesnutt also suggests that such displays of racial animosity are less of an anomaly than they might have first appeared.

An event occurring later in the train scene shows that nonvisual encounters with other bodies do create a strong and immediate presence. The following passage details Miller's reactions to a group of African American farm laborers who later board the car. The narrator observes:

They were noisy, loquacious, happy, dirty, and malodorous. For a while Miller was amused and pleased. They were his people, and he felt a certain expansive warmth toward them in spite of their obvious shortcomings. By and by, however, the air became too close, and he went out upon the platform. For the sake of the democratic ideal, which meant so much to his race, he might have endured the affliction. He could easily imagine that people of refinement, with the power in their hands, might be tempted to strain the democratic ideal in order to avoid such contact; but personally, and apart from the mere matter of racial sympathy, these people were just as offensive to him as to the whites in the other end of the train.

(61)

Here, bodies in direct proximity to Miller register an immediate presence to him via sound and smell, helping initially, the text suggests, to produce Miller's "expansive warmth" towards the

farmers. To be sure, this encounter does not exactly engender the utopian sympathy between Miller and the laboring African Americans that Du Bois describes, given Miller's eventual expression of repugnance. However, these close contacts at least seem to impress upon Miller the immediacy of the others' presences, working against the problematic notion that these bodies are "temporally" segregated from him.<sup>154</sup>

As I suggested earlier, *The Marrow of Tradition* works to connect segregation and turn-of-the-century racial violence, showing not only how "segregation works in concert with violence to ensure black subordination to whites" (Bentley and Gunning 422) but also how extraordinary violations of black bodies might arise out of segregation practices.<sup>155</sup> Specifically, Chesnutt implies the short step between a climate that systematically obstructs possibilities for corporeal continuity between whites and nonwhites and the actual destruction of bodies through lynching and other acts of violence. The novel demonstrates how the incredible horror of lynching and other violent acts becomes an almost logical outcome of the lack of regard for black bodies under segregation. Chesnutt may have recognized a particular urgency to link the effects of segregation laws to racial violence during this moment. As described above, Southern segregation was something of a novel feature of postbellum culture; similarly, lynching as a response to perceived sexual relations between black men and white women was somewhat

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<sup>154</sup>Indeed for Wagner and for McWilliams, this scene reveals Chesnutt's problematic class biases. However, Sundquist's account of Chesnutt's journals offers another perspective on this passage in which "we see not the model for the but the limits of Chesnutt's identification with Miller" (438). Sundquist explains, "In his own journal of 1879, Chesnutt had described a train trip to Washington, D.C., during which the train took on a group of 'fifty darkies' going to work at a truck farm near Norfolk. The lower-class blacks filled the car, 'and as the day was warm and the people rather dirty, the odor may be better imagined than described. Although it was nothing to me,' Chesnutt continued, 'I could sympathize with my fellow traveler,' apparently a white 'gentleman' with whom Chesnutt had conversed, 'who stuck his head out the window, and swore ha he would never be caught in such a scrape again.' His use of the term 'darkies' notwithstanding, Chesnutt's marginal identification with the lower-class blacks is far different from Miller's discomfort" (438).

<sup>155</sup>Scholars of this period have also noted connections between the practices of segregation and lynching. Grace Hale points out, for instance, the ways in which lynchings provided "narratives of white unity" and that they "worked by ritualistically uniting white southerners, by embodying the community in action" (228).

specific to this moment as well. Martha Hodes, for example, points out a comparative antebellum tolerance for interracial intimacies. As Hodes's study of antebellum documents shows, "Black men could be acquitted or pardoned on charges of raping white women; white husbands could be denied divorces even if their wives had committed adultery with black men; and the black men in such adultery cases could go without retribution" (59).<sup>156</sup> As I mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the powerful mythology of the black male rapist arose alongside African American males' post-emancipation claims for economic advancement and participation in government.<sup>157</sup> The work of speaker-activists of the time such as Wells and Douglass helped to expose the "wedding" of accusations of rape against black men to white fears about the augmentation of black political power.<sup>158</sup> *The Marrow of Tradition* also importantly exposes the myth of the black rapist by showing the accusations against Sandy to be false. I think that Chesnutt is also concerned, though, to more firmly illustrate that the lack of corporeal continuity among the races under segregation creates a key condition for the ultimate execution of such outrageous acts of violence against African Americans.

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<sup>156</sup>As Hodes also notes, this level of toleration was never as great as that of relations between white men and black women, given Southern patriarchy's more severe censure of white women's sexual transgressions than the transgressions of white men (60).

<sup>157</sup>The novel directly registers the black male rapist figure in detailing the circumstances surrounding the accusations against Sandy for Polly Ochiltree's rape and murder: "'This,' said Carteret, 'is something more than an ordinary crime, to be dealt with by the ordinary processes of law. It is a murderous and fatal assault upon a woman of our race,—upon our race in the person of its womanhood, its crown and flower. If such crimes are not punished with swift and terrible directness, the whole white womanhood of the South is in danger'" (182). See Najmi for an account of the ways in which Chesnutt reveals how this myth helped to divide the solidarities of African Americans and white women.

<sup>158</sup>See Wells's "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases" and Douglass's "Why is the Negro Lynched?" See also Du Bois's related thoughts on the subject in *Writings in Periodicals Edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, Selections from "The Crisis."* Of Wells's work, in particular, Sundquist locates its power in showing how the "South's 'rape complex' was detached from reality, a free-floating trope of attack that could be used with virtual impunity on any political occasion and in support of any racial cause" (410).

The novel's depictions of Sandy's prospective lynching underscore the complete absence of corporeal continuity on the part of the potential witnesses to the violent act by portraying the event as a spectacle. The narrator notes, "Already the preparations were under way for the impending execution. A T-rail from the railroad yard had been procured, and men were burying it in the square before the jail. Others were bringing chains, and a load of pinewood was piled in convenient proximity. Some enterprising individual had begun the erection of seats from which, for a pecuniary consideration, the spectacle might be the more easily and comfortably viewed" (219).<sup>159</sup> Reinforcing the sense of spectacle, Ellis, one of the paper's reporters, learns that "the railroads would run excursions from the neighboring towns in order to bring spectators to the scene; from another that the burning was to take place early in the evening, so that the children might not be kept up beyond their usual bedtime" (219). Further evidence that these young prospective witnesses conceive of black bodies as utterly separate and different from their own, Ellis overhears that "In one group that he passed he heard several young men discussing the question of which portions of the negro's body they would prefer for souvenirs" (220). These passages resonate with accounts of spectacle lynching as a specifically modern phenomenon grounded in a culture of consumption. Spectacle lynching, according to Grace Hale's analysis in *Making Whiteness*, became a way of differentiating a white consuming public from a black one

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<sup>159</sup>Chesnutt's description here closely echoes Hale's historical account of the prime features of spectacle lynching at the turn of the century: "In the decades following 1890, many lynchings no longer occurred in places untouched by the technological advances of the larger world. Lynchers drove cars, spectators used cameras, out-of-town visitors arrived on specially chartered excursion trains, and the towns and counties in which these horrifying events happened had newspapers, telegraph offices, and even radio stations that announced times and locations of these upcoming violent spectacles" (201). Literary critics interested in Chesnutt's deployment of the spectacle of lynching have also cited these passages in their efforts to understand lynching as a practice that helped to stimulate white racial unity (Robinson 105-6). Robinson further observes in his analysis of lynching's characterization as spectacle in the novel: "Without public floggings and slave auctions, whites sought to replace these racialized events with a new racial spectacle in order to once again create a separate space/act for blacks and themselves. With lynching, whites found the means once again to consume the black body" (105).



(206).<sup>160</sup> Hale points out that while whites and blacks might otherwise be unified by their status as consumers, spectacle lynching undermined this commonality ensuring that “Only whites, whether they endorsed the violence or not, could experience the ‘amusement’ of a black man burned” (206).

Chesnutt’s characterization of those carrying out the lynching act directs the practice back to smaller scale actions of the body, as he describes lynching as a “habit.” Following the discovery of Ochiltree’s murder the narrator notes:

A committee of white men was hastily formed. Acting independently of the police force, which was practically ignored as likely to favor the Negroes, this committee set to work to discover the murderer. The spontaneous activity of the whites was accompanied by a visible shrinkage of the colored population. This could not be taken as any indication of guilt, but was merely a recognition of the palpable fact that the American habit of lynching had so whetted the thirst for black blood that a Negro suspected of crime had to face at least the possibility of a short shrift and a long rope, not to mention more gruesome horrors, without the intervention of judge or jury. (179)

The passage also raises the issue of the law’s ineffectiveness in protecting black bodies that I described earlier. Likewise, the newspaper’s rationalization of the act invokes a “higher law,” or what Finseth calls a “grotesque bastardization of higher law,” to justify action outside of state and national laws: “If an outraged people, justly infuriated, and impatient of the slow processes of the courts, should assert their inherent sovereignty, which the law after all was merely intended to embody, and should choose, in obedience to the higher law, to set aside temporarily,

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<sup>160</sup>As Hale notes, however, lynchings executed during the night were a much more frequent occurrence than the spectacle lynchings witnessed by large crowds (201).

the ordinary judicial procedure, it would serve as a warning and an example to the vicious elements of the community, of the swift and terrible punishment which would fall like the judgment of God, upon any one who laid sacrilegious hands upon white womanhood” (186).<sup>161</sup> Further attesting to the pervasiveness of such sentiments, Watson, an African American lawyer, appeals to the mayor to stop the lynching, only to report, ““My reception was cold. He admitted that lynching was, as a rule, unjustifiable, but maintained that there were exceptions to all rules,—that laws were made, after all, to express the will of the people in regard to the ordinary administration of justice, but that in an emergency the sovereign people might assert itself and take the law into its own hands—the creature was not greater than the creator”” (193). Again, given that the law is not enough to regulate the interactions of “citizens,” such sentiments suggest Chesnutt’s urgency to stimulate a sense of corporeal continuity in which persons might feel “carnally” bound to others rather than hostilely separated from them.

Robyn Wiegman’s analysis of lynching in the context of citizenship helps to illuminate another important dimension of Chesnutt’s novel. Wiegman theorizes the relationship between “disembodied” white male citizen and embodied African American male targets of violence. Referring to assessments offered by Lauren Berlant and others concerning the ways in which white males remained unencumbered by corporeality, Wiegman explains in a passage I cited in the Introduction to this project:

In other words, it was the repression of the specific racial and gender markers of privileged identity—of whiteness and maleness—that characterized the figure

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<sup>161</sup>On both religious and secular appeals to “higher law” in nineteenth-century literary and cultural texts, see Crane’s *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature*. As in his discussion of Chesnutt’s novel, Crane aims to “delineate conceptions of the ethical basis of American law as an interplay of conscience (moral inspiration) and consent (political dialogue) which produces a plausibly universal moral consensus about the terms of justice and citizenship” (6).

‘American citizen’ and inaugurated its rhetorical definition as an inclusive social body. In this constitution of the citizen as a disembodied entity, bound not to physical delineations but to national ones, the white male was (and continues to be) ‘freed’ from the corporeality that might otherwise impede his insertion into the larger body of national identity” (94).

Wiegman thus concludes: “For the African American male subject, on the other hand, it was precisely the imposition of an extreme corporeality that defined his distance from the privileged ranks of citizenry. With the advent of Emancipation and its attendant loss of the slave system’s marking of the African American body as property, lynching emerged to reclaim and reassert the centrality of black male corporeality, deterring the now theoretically possible move toward citizenry and disembodied abstraction” (94).<sup>162</sup> Making a similar point, Hartman notes:

The individual, denuded in the harsh light of scrutiny, reveals a subject tethered by various orders of constraint and obscured by the figure of the self-possessed, for lurking behind the disembodied and self-possessed individual is the fleshy substance of the embodied and the encumbered—that is, the castigated particularity of the universal. In this light, the transubstantiation of the captive into volitional subject, chattel into proprietor, and the circumscribed body of blackness into the disembodied and abstract universal seems improbable, if not impossible. (123)<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Analyzing the black male rapist myth in this light, she further notes, “the white male desires the image he must create in order to castrate, and it is precisely through the mythology of the black male as mythically endowed rapist that he has effectively done this” (98).

<sup>163</sup>Kaplan’s analysis of U.S. imperialism provides another insight: “The presence of the black body immersed in yet invulnerable to the physical contagions of the imperial battlefield works to elevate the figure of the white male to a level of political abstraction, but makes him dependent on that same embodied presence” (233). For

These accounts remind us that any promise of corporeal continuity can only be realized if the embodied status of previously “disembodied” persons is recognized. Interestingly, the novel’s ending emphasizes white male embodiment with its focus on Dodie’s need for a life-saving operation. Like Old Delamere’s aging body, Dodie’s physical peril, which is also stressed in several other moments of the novel, calls attention to his vulnerable status as a body. Such a precarious state of injury, as Hoblin puts it, “results in a permanent awareness of [one’s] ‘endangered body’” (235). This attention to white male embodiment takes on greater significance given the observation common among critics that Dodie represents the future of the white race: “Dodie’s body functions as the space where the sins of the past will resolve themselves into the possibilities of the future” (Kawash 122).

Identifying Chesnutt’s emphasis on embodiment at this point in the novel sheds further light on critics’ reading of the ending of *The Marrow of Tradition*. Here again, critics have focused on the apparently accommodationist stance endorsed by Janet’s decision to allow her husband to perform Dodie’s tracheotomy even as she is grieving the death of her own child, a victim of the violent actions of the massacre. Some critics have suggested that the novel affirms “the moral enlightenment of the Carterets through the moral high ground taken by the Millers in deciding to save Dodie even after the white mob has killed their own son” (Roe 237). But as Roe further points out, this celebratory reading fails to consider that Miller’s compromising stance in agreeing to operate on Dodie means the salvation of a glaring representative of Southern white racism. Here, the extension of “moral feeling” in the vein of a subservient accommodationism stands to perpetuate further racial oppression.

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a study of contemporary cultural representations of the politics of the “newly” embodied white man, see Sally Robinson’s *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*.

Kawash, among others, has challenged such readings, arguing that Dodie's opaqueness as a sign challenges readings of the ending that would emphasize an inevitable white racial dominance (122-23).<sup>164</sup> Kawash further reads the uncertainty of the ending (in which we know that Miller intends to operate but we don't know the outcome of the surgery) as an indication of a broader uncertainty concerning the future of racial justice. Critics such as Kawash underline the uncertainty of the novel's ending, but I would direct more attention to the image of surgery with which the novel concludes. Ending with this focus suggests that if the vulnerable white male body is to be "saved," it is only through the highly intimate touch of the African American surgeon. The image of surgery here evokes a particularly strong sense of touch and its dynamics. As Elaine Scarry points out, "Situations of sickness, injury, or operation often entail heightened forms of the passive and the active. The patient is in a situation of extreme passivity; the physician or surgeon, extreme activeness. In fact, if one imagines the normal distribution of activity and passivity in the ordinary act of touch and being touched, it becomes clear that both are in medicine magnified" (873). It is not so much a potentially problematic moral feeling extended by blacks to whites that Chesnutt envisions as a shaping force of future race relations. Rather, Chesnutt's conception of the future is overlaid by the compelling image of a white male body literally and figuratively open and vulnerable to the touch of an African-American hand.

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<sup>164</sup>Similarly, Wilson adds that Janet's refusal to grant the reconciliation her sister Olivia desires moves away from the damaging family or kinship model of racial affiliation (146).

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer some thoughts on the significance of and possible directions for my work in this project. The body, as represented in the novels I have examined here, constitutes a medium for knowledge of other embodied beings, however partial or slight-seeming this knowledge may be. This conception of embodiment, as the work of postmodern phenomenology suggests holds ethical significance given that such knowledge of others may stimulate care for and sense of greater obligation to them. However fraught the notions of connection and sympathy may be, this potential in the body's capacity for corporeal continuity ought not to be overlooked or underestimated. Indeed, they are figured as creating quite powerful impressions on characters in the novels. Given that many literary critics have viewed these novels' treatments of embodiment as indicative of the body's obstruction to creating a livable world, I think that my findings within this particular set of literary texts are significant. In my future work, I may thus explore the ways in which authors such as London and Norris might be productively read in relation to American authors such as Walt Whitman and Harriet Beecher Stowe who have been recognized for their interest in corporeal epistemologies and structures of affect. The continuities between turn-of-the-century novels and the writings of figures such as Spencer and James that I briefly sketched in Chapter 1 might provide another fruitful avenue of inquiry.

Beyond generating insights about the particular texts in my study, my work on this project suggests to me that novels' attention to embodied experience indicates that a somatic attentiveness is required to fully realize the body's ethical potential. Moreover, novels that centrally incorporate embodiment may serve to encourage the development of habits of somatic attentiveness on the part of readers. Literary critics have frequently assumed that marked attention to embodiment in texts operates as a "distancing device," whereby a disproportionate knowledge of character bodies necessarily serves to limit readers' connection to or identification with characters. However, such literary deployments of embodiment might instead suggest a value in conceiving of the body as a primary medium of connection precisely because it stands to widen scope of those who merit concern. Along this line, I might be interested to explore how literary critics themselves have contributed to this overlooking of bodies. That this inclination seems to have operated to such a strong degree on the part of critics of lit naturalism suggests that it may be prove a more general phenomenon worthy of investigation.

In "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" John Locke says, "Due care being had to keep the body in strength and vigour, so that it may be able to obey and execute the orders of the *mind*; the next and principal business it to set the mind right, that on all occasions it may be dispos'd to consent to nothing but what may be suitable to the dignity and excellency of a rational creature" (31). Locke's statement indicates a certain ease with which we still, I would venture to say, dismiss or downplay, in our efforts to get on with more important business, the body's significant contributions to knowledge and action. If the body in its very make-up is, as some turn-of-the-century novelists and contemporary phenomenologists suggest it is, a veritable repository for knowledge of other embodied beings that stands to stimulate greater care and concern for them, such dismissals are surely regrettable. However, literary texts that accord

emphasis to embodied experience may serve an important role in helping to bring bodies squarely back to our attention.



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